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MACINTYRE, KIERKEGAARD, AND THE POST-METAPHYSICAL CRITIQUE OF RATIONAL THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Alasdair MacIntyre is best known for his influential critique of modern philosophy, and his stark warning that the only thing that can save us from moral relativism and post-Nietzschean nihilism is a revival of the 'classical tradition' of Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas. His attempt to unravel the successive errors of modern philosophy begins with a critique of Kierkegaard, who is blamed for introducing an irrational element into philosophy which enabled his successors to claim that moral utterances are no more than expressions of preference. I am arguing that the same assumptions that lead to MacIntyre's dismissal of Kierkegaard deprive him of the resources for an adequate response to the post-metaphysical critique of the tradition he is trying to recuperate.

Unlike MacIntyre, I do not think it possible to conduct a rational defence of Christianity within the framework of the Platonic-Socratic dialectic, for I find that the difference between Christianity and the 'wisdom of the Greeks' is more fundamental than the rupture between pre-modern and modern philosophy. For me, the possibility of a philosophical 'supplement' to Christianity hinges on Kierkegaard's distinction between Platonic speculation and Socratic scepticism, which allows him to preserve the difference between the objects of faith and those of the understanding. I try to demonstrate that Kierkegaard's critique of Platonic-Hegelian speculation is equally applicable to MacIntyre, and that while MacIntyre's response to Nietzsche is essentially reactive, a rearguard action which is already too late, Kierkegaard anticipates the death of 'God' by clarifying in advance the difference between Christianity and Platonism. Not only does Kierkegaard offer a pragmatic alternative to the much discredited tradition of metaphysical theology, his phenomenological analysis of the structures of human existence provides the categories for a more adequate account of the positions adopted by Nietzsche and his followers than MacIntyre's philosophy can provide.

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This thesis is dedicated, with love, to Clare.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation has been carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text. No part of it has been submitted for any other degree, or presented to any other University.

The views expressed here are my own, and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AM John Horten and Susan Mendius (eds.) *After MacIntyre*
GB Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*
MFL Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*
NP Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*
OB Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*

Works by Derrida

GD *The Gift of Death*
MP *Margins of Philosophy*

Works by Kierkegaard

CA *The Concept of Anxiety*
CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*
E/O *Either/Or*
FT *Fear and Trembling*
JC *Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*
PF *Philosophical Fragments*
PC *Practice in Christianity*
R *Repetition*
SD *The Sickness unto Death*
SLW *Stages on Life's Way*

Works by MacIntyre

AV *After Virtue*
WJ *Whose Justice? Which Morality?*
TRV *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*

Works by Nietzsche

GM *On the Genealogy of Morals*
TI *The Twilight of the Idols*
WP *The Will to Power*

1. MACINTYRE, MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY

In an age of increasing specialization, the range of topics covered by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre reveals a refreshing disregard for academic boundaries. Indeed, one of his chief concerns is the process of fragmentation which has divested the modern curriculum of all but a semblance of unity; to the point that his project as a whole can be viewed as an attempt to restore that unity by reinstating rational theology as the queen of the sciences. In any case, an enterprise of such scope and ambition can hardly avoid dealing with questions of a theological nature; and at some point between writing the first and second volumes of his major trilogy - *After Virtue* (1981), *Whose Justice? Which Morality?* (1988) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, Tradition* (1990) - MacIntyre adopted the explicitly Christian standpoint which is the focus of the present study. Identifying himself as a Catholic philosopher, he has called for "a new and very different kind of Thomistic revival," a Thomism able to engage with the most important developments in recent philosophy without losing sight of "that traditional philosophical framework without which, as we ought to have learned by now, so much of Catholic practice in the secular world becomes unintelligible and atrophies."[1]

There are two aspects of MacIntyre's project that I want to question. The first is his apparently seamless progression from the Aristotelian position defended in *After Virtue* to a type of Catholic philosophy that seems to be largely bereft of anything distinctively Christian. My second line of criticism concerns the boundaries between his own position and those which he defines it against. On the one hand, while generally applauding his critique of liberal modernity, I will suggest that the premodern metaphysics that MacIntyre wants to revive has more in common with the projects he rejects than any of them have with Christianity. On the other hand, I want to argue that there is a certain current of postmodern thought which not only resists his criticism but is better placed than his own philosophy to address the central concepts of Christian dogmatics. I will start with a survey of the main arguments put forward in the aforementioned trilogy, before beginning, in Chapter 2, to outline an alternative hypothesis based on the work of some of MacIntyre's post-metaphysical opponents. In part, my argument takes its cue from a suggestion made by Derrida in the *Gift of Death*, an excursus on the *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History*[2] by the Czech writer Jan Patočka:

> In different respects and with different results, the discourses of Levinas or Marion, perhaps of Ricoeur also, are in the same situation as that of Patočka. But in the final analysis this list has no clear limit and it can be said, once again taking into account the differences, that a certain Kant and a certain Hegel, Kierkegaard of course, and I might even dare to say for provocative effect, Heidegger also, belong to this tradition that consists in proposing a nondogmatic doublet of dogma, a philosophical and metaphysical doublet, in any case a thinking that "repeats" the possibility of religion without religion. (GD 49)

I would add a certain Nietzsche to Derrida's list, but the bulk of my argument will be drawn from the pseudonymous writings of Søren Kierkegaard, which will be shown to contain the resources for a more adequate response to Nietzsche's critique of Christianity than anything MacIntyre's philosophy can provide.

First, I will present a chronological summary of MacIntyre's trilogy, partly in order to do justice to his insistence on the essentially historical and narrative constitution of all enquiry, and partly because I want to question the feasibility of arguing *to* Christianity from an external starting-point. There may of course be a distinction between the first premise of an enquiry and its historical starting-point. Whether or not they coincide in MacIntyre's account will depend on how closely his analysis of the progress of rational enquiry conforms to Hegel's. That will be the theme of the final section of this chapter, where I touch on some of the issues raised in the collection of critical essays published in *After MacIntyre* (1994).

1. 1 *After Virtue*

MacIntyre begins by envisaging a civilization which has been deprived of most of the benefits of science by some devastating catastrophe, an event which has also shattered the theoretical paradigm within which alone those fragments which survive could be rendered intelligible (AV 1-2). This, he claims, is the condition of contemporary moral theory and practice (the scientific analogy is significant, and reappears at a crucial point in his subsequent argument). We have inherited a set of precepts and prohibitions for which we are no longer able to supply any rational justification. The catastrophe was of course the Enlightenment, which rejected the largely Aristotelian framework from which the rules of what now emerged for the first time as the discrete domain of morality (AV 39) were originally derived. To all but MacIntyre, the disastrous significance of this event remains concealed, and therefore all the more complete, because official history regards the Enlightenment as a great advance, a liberation from the oppression of feudal hierarchies and from the prejudice and superstition which had hitherto cramped the progress of rational enquiry. Neither analytical philosophy nor phenomenology can help us, for neither has the resources to disclose any alternative to the prevailing paradigm (AV 2). So in order to support his unwelcome claim MacIntyre proposes to write a philosophical history somewhat in the manner of Hegel in that the principles of philosophy will be treated as historical productions rather than timeless truths (AV 3). But far from any reassuring vision of the evolution and self-unfolding of *Geist*, this will be a tale of decline.

Despite and even because of their endless disagreements, MacIntyre treats the various schools of modern philosophy as a single undertaking, unified by their failure to provide a rational justification for morality. But despite this failure, to which the proliferation of

seemingly unresolvable conflicts bears ample testimony, the ideology of the 'Enlightenment project' continues to dominate the political, economic and academic structures of liberal modernity as if nothing had gone wrong (AV 61, 85). Indeed, the ability of liberalism to tolerate conflicting views, dignified under the name of pluralism, is cited by its apologists as evidence of moral progress. This view is a defining characteristic of one of the three rival systems of theory and practice which constitute MacIntyre's map of the available philosophical options, the other two being his own position, defined in continuity with the 'classical tradition' of Aristotle and Plato, and the approach exemplified by Nietzsche, the most rigorous exponent so far of a sceptical tradition which can be said to link the sophistic antagonists of Plato and Socrates to the exponents of deconstruction.

In order to retrace the route by which Cartesian foundationalism degenerated into postmodern relativism, MacIntyre first of all turns his attention to what he takes to be Kierkegaard's attempt to ground morality in the concept of fundamental choice. In the dialogue portrayed in *Either/Or* between the representatives of the aesthetic and the ethical modes of existence, MacIntyre detects the first appearance of a distinctively modern conception of moral commitment, as the expression of an arbitrary and criterionless choice between incommensurable moral premises (AV 39). "Kierkegaard no longer attempts to *justify* morality at all; but his account of it has precisely the same structure as that which is shared by the accounts of Kant, Hume and Diderot, except that where they appeal to characteristics of the passions or of reason, he invokes what he takes to be characteristics of fundamental decision-making." (AV 52) What all these philosophers have in common is a conviction that the authority of moral values needs to be grounded in some aspect of human nature. What MacIntyre is arguing is that "any project of this form was bound to fail because of an ineradicable discrepancy between their shared conception of moral rules and precepts on the one hand and what was shared - despite much larger divergences - in their conception of human nature on the other." (AV 52) The role played by Kierkegaard is pivotal, for his rejection of the possibility of a rational justification for morality cleared the way for those who inherited this notion to reject morality itself. However, I will postpone a more detailed examination of this part of MacIntyre's argument until the final chapter, for I will not be able to make an adequate response until we have heard Kierkegaard's version of events.

The inevitability of the Enlightenment's failure to discover a rational foundation for morality is attributed to its rejection of the teleological conception of human nature within which alone it is possible to make sense of the moral injunctions inherited from the culture that preceded it.

> Within that teleological scheme there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature. Ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter. (AV 52)

This formula is encapsulated in the structure of Aristotle's practical syllogism, in which the major premise specifies the goal of some activity, the minor premise identifies an instance with the requisite potential, and the outcome is the activity itself. Each of its components requires both the others in order to make it intelligible. In the absence of any clear idea of man-as-he-ought-to-be, modern philosophy was left with a moral agent stripped of essential purposes and an apparently arbitrary set of rules which were originally designed specifically to be discrepant with untutored human nature (AV 55). As a result, the moral philosophers of the eighteenth century were reduced to trying to derive morality from some aspect, the reason or passions, of the very thing that it was supposed to correct. Kantian attempts to ground morality in the rationality of the newly-invented autonomous individual all come to grief on their failure to provide any universalizable account of what constitutes rationality (AV 45-6). Without the authority of divine law the categorical imperative rings hollow, and its most basic principle - that other people should be treated as ends and never as means - is routinely flouted in the bureaucratic manipulation of social structures. Much of MacIntyre's argument (AV 74-108) is directed against what he calls a "metaphysical belief in managerial expertise" (AV 108) and its reliance on mechanistic models of society drawn from the conventional philosophy of social science (AV 89), which emulates the supposed neutrality of the natural sciences by purging itself of value-judgements and dealing only with facts and statistics. Reason is no longer considered competent to order the passions or to prescribe ends but becomes sheerly instrumental, concerned only with means (AV 54).Utilitarianism tries to contrive a new teleology based on a calculus of pleasure and pain. It fails because the sources of happiness, the objects of the passions, are too heterogeneous to be ranked in any order likely to attract universal assent (AV 64).

According to MacIntyre, the teleological structure of Aristotle's account of practical reason remains intact when it is incorporated into a theistic framework, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim (AV 53). The hypothetical imperative of classical ethics is reinforced by the categorical imperative of divine law, and the scheme is extended by the relocation of the *telos* of human life to another world. However, the moral order is still discoverable by reason, and moral utterances retain both cognitive and normative value. This is because the virtues of the Aristotelian *polis* and the very different list of virtues commended in the New Testament share the same logical and conceptual structure. "It is of course this parallelism which allows Aquinas to synthesize Aristotle and the New Testament." (AV 184). In fact, all morality presupposes some form of teleology (AV 56), even when this has been obscured by the discrepancy between the facts of human nature and the precepts of morality, a discrepancy which forms the basis of the modern assumption that "no valid argument can move from entirely factual premises to any moral or evaluative conclusion" (AV 56). As an accidental product of the history of philosophy which has come to be accepted as a timeless logical truth, this principle constitutes an epitaph to the entire project of moral philosophy (AV 59).

The connection between fact and value, or 'is' and 'ought', depends on a functional conception of a human being as fitted to various roles, within a family, a profession, a religious community etc., which can be performed either well or badly. "It is only when man is thought of as individual prior to and apart from all roles that 'man' ceases to be a functional concept." (AV 59) In a framework where actual and potential are teleologically related, it is a matter of fact that ethical actions tend toward the realization of the ends proper to human beings, and hence moral assertions can be judged to be true or false. "But take away from them that in virtue of which they are hypothetical *and* that in virtue of which they were categorical and what are they?" (AV 60) Their meaning is radically destabilized and we are left with the simulacrum of a moral vocabulary (AV 2), which then becomes available for the use of competing and incompatible interests. Detached from their proper theoretical context, moral sentences lend themselves to arbitrary and often conflicting uses, leading to the interminable disagreements which are the most striking feature of contemporary moral and political debate. In turn, the intractability of these disagreements lends plausibility to subjectivist theories of morality which are nonetheless contradicted by the ostensibly objective intent of moral discourse. Moral relativism is referred to throughout *After Virtue* as 'emotivism' - the theory that moral utterances are expressions of personal preference and devoid of objective reference, a theory which the logical positivists extended to metaphysical and religious claims (AV 76), apparently assuming their own position to be somehow exempt. The troublesome gap between fact and value is annulled by discrediting the notion of an objective scale of values as distinct from the facts of human nature. In order to reopen this gap and thus clear a space for a teleological understanding of morality, MacIntyre makes a distinction between a theory of *use* and a theory of *meaning*, i.e. an emotivist theory of the way moral terms are actually employed in modern society and an emotivist theory of morality as such (AV 13). This is the essential difference between his own critique of modern morality and Nietzsche's assault on morality in general.

The fatal weakness of the Enlightenment project leaves only two alternatives, and halfway through the book we are presented with a stark choice between Nietzsche and Aristotle (AV 109-120). MacIntyre concedes the force of Nietzsche's critique of modernity, but since its failure to justify morality is rooted in its rejection of Aristotelian teleology, MacIntyre claims that Nietzsche's conclusions about morality are only unavoidable if that rejection was justified in the first place (AV 117). Nietzsche's mistake was his failure to question the individualistic sociology of modernity, which he proceeded to take to its logical conclusion (AV 257-9). His vision of unbridled will to power is a natural successor to the modern construction of the autonomous individual, whose sovereignty remains half-hearted as long as it is held in check by timid Kantian scrupulosity. However, MacIntyre recognizes that an Aristotelian alternative cannot simply be abstracted from the context of the ancient *polis* and transplanted to the twentieth century. The positive thesis of *After Virtue* concerns what

needs to be added to Aristotle's political and moral philosophy in order to bring it up to date. What is lacking is a diachronic dimension that takes account of changing social contexts.

In order to remedy this deficiency and at the same time to identify what it is that unifies what he calls 'the classical tradition', MacIntyre sets out to identify a "core concept of the virtues" which "in some sense embodies the history of which it is the outcome." (AV 186) The task is accomplished in three stages. A virtue is defined, first, in the context of what he calls 'a practice', then in terms of a 'narrative conception of the unity of a human life', and finally in relation to the moral 'tradition' which it helps to sustain. A practice is defined as

> any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (AV 187)

Crucial to this concept is MacIntyre's distinction between the goods which are internal to practices and those which are external. The former can only be specified in terms of the relevant practice, and judged by its participants, while the latter are those contingent and transferable rewards such as money and fame associated with high achievement. Whereas external goods are objects of competition which may be obtained by fair means or foul, internal goods "are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice." (AV 190-1) This provides the background for a preliminary definition of a virtue.

> *A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.* (AV 191).

In order to find out what happens when the demands of one practice conflict with those of another we need to move to the second stage of MacIntyre's account, in which the concept of a practice is expanded to incorporate that of a human life in its entirety. The appropriate ordering of practices is itself a supreme practice, the guiding principle of which has to be some conception of the good life, or *telos* of human beings as a species (AV 201-3). We all live with some conception of the future and set ourselves goals toward which we advance or fail to advance. This involves an understanding of one's life as a certain kind of narrative, a quest sustained by the qualities or virtues that will help one to achieve those goals (AV 219). In order for an action to be intelligible it is necessary to know something about the sequence of actions and intentions to which it belongs (AV 206-11). "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" (AV 216). Only a narrative account of human identity can provide it with the kind of unity necessary for the attribution of moral accountability (AV 208-9), or with the

singleness of purpose which is no longer available to the criterionless subject of modern philosophy.

> To ask "What is the good for me?" is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion. To ask "What is the good for man?" is to ask what all answers to the former question must have in common. (AV 218-9)

The function of practical reason is to relate one's particular circumstances to the relevant universal, each of which is related in turn by a hierarchy of for-the-sake-of relationships to the *archê-telos* of all human activity.

In order to acquire an adequate conception of the good, as well as those qualities conducive to its achievement, it is necessary to undergo a process of moral education. In the course of an apprenticeship in any practice we learn to distinguish between what 'seems good to me' and what counts as good within the community of fellow practitioners. This of course can only be discovered in fellowship with others, hence the importance for Aristotle of friendship, which is itself one of the virtues (AV 150). There are two, interdependent kinds of virtue. The virtues of character are habits acquired through practice, dispositions to act and feel in certain ways (AV 149), passions reformed and redirected by reason. They are co-ordinated by the intellectual virtue of *phronêsis*, which is the faculty, gained by experience, of suiting means to ends. "We need to remember however that although Aristotle treats the acquisition and exercise of the virtues as means to an end, the relationship of means to end is internal and not external." (AV 184} The virtues cannot be substituted by some other means; nor can their ends be specified independently of the virtues themselves, (AV 148) for a life lived according to the virtues is itself a crucial component of the good. "The good life is the life spent seeking the good life." (AV 219)

What this account makes clear is that the good can only be identified in company with others, so that the narrative of moral education must take its place in that of the community within which the individual learns to distinguish the good as such. "For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity." (AV 221) This brings us to the third stage of the definition, and MacIntyre's concept of a tradition. Every practice has a history, and this positions the practitioner in relation to both the past and future of that practice, itself part of a larger social history which encompasses many such practices. MacIntyre defines a tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition." (AV 222) An individual's search for the good is conducted in the context of such extended arguments.

> Once again the phenomenon of embedding is crucial: the history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the traditions through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us, the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and

> made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions.(AV 222)

And what maintains a tradition in good order is the exercise of those virtues that contribute to the internal goods of that tradition. Thus we have a rich and complex account of the virtues, as those qualities which sustain the goods internal to practices, to individual lives, and to the life of a community of intersecting narratives and practices in which the good consists in the harmonious ordering of all three levels of activity.

In the atomized societies of the modern world the picture is very different. The virtues are still held in high regard, but without the conceptual background provided by an Aristotelian understanding of the essentially social constitution of human nature and of the kinds of activity appropriate to the various stages of a human life it is no longer possible to provide anything like a systematic account of their operation, of their relation to individual psychology and society as a whole, or of how they may be acquired. "*Either* the virtues - or some of them - could be understood as expressions of the natural passions of the individual *or* they - or some of them - could be understood as dispositions necessary to curb and to limit the destructive effect of some of those natural passions." (AV 228) The virtues have gradually been homogenized under the general heading of virtue in the singular (AV 233), so that the distinction and relation between the intellectual and moral virtues has been lost. Virtue tends to be regarded as a general disposition to obey certain rules, but *which* rules these may be is not at all certain (AV 236). The only hope in such a predicament lies in a reappraisal by people of good will of the importance of community, and MacIntyre concludes with a plea for

> the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians . . . have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another - doubtless very different - St. Benedict. (AV 263)

MacIntyre's cry in the wilderness has an eschatalogical resonance which reminds John D. Caputo of the famous interview with *Der Spiegel* (1966) in which Heidegger pronounced his epitaph on the whole experiment of secular modernity:

> *Heidegger*: . . . philosophy will not be able to effect an immediate transformation of the present condition of the world. That is not only true of philosophy but of all merely human thought and endeavor. Only a God can save us. The sole possibility that is left for us is to prepare a sort of readiness, through thinking and poeticizing, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god in the time of foundering (*Untergang*); for in the face of the god who is absent, we founder.[3]

Caputo goes as far as to argue that "[i]t is pretty much the same story told by both Heidegger and MacIntyre, who, although they are otherwise unlikely bedfellows, agree in all the essentials: the great beginning in the Greeks, the terrible decline in modernity, the hope in a

new beginning; nostalgia, antimodernism."[4] These eschatological narratives leave us with the conviction that nothing short of a miracle can save us. "And, since miracles are beyond our individual or collective reach, they leave us dreaming of a new dawn, a wondrous transformation, even while they remain oblivious to the possibilities of the present."[5] Yet when it comes to spelling out what those possibilities might be, Caputo has little to add to what he calls MacIntyre's soundest advice: "he quite rightly points out that what survives of the Aristotelian ideal can be put to work today in small communities which work together for the common good - like the university or the hospital or certain surviving ethnic communities."[6] More telling is Caputo's criticism of what that ideal entails, in particular the functional definition of selfhood which allows MacIntyre to restore the teleological connection between facts and values. For "[i]t is precisely on hierarchico-teleological grounds that Aristotle justifies slavery: slaves are "living instruments" useful for running a household (*Pol.* I, 4), whose merely passive reason serves the purposes of those who possess the full presence of reason."[7] MacIntyre claims that Aristotle's views on slaves, women and barbarians can be expurgated without injuring his overall scheme (AV 159-60). But Caputo argues that exclusion and repression were built into the binary system of higher and lower, ends and means, reality and appearance etc., that constitutes the Platonic metaphysics which governed the relationships of the classical world.

> Hence, to try to patch this over is not simply to make an adjustment in the classical view but to undo the whole scheme and to swing off in the Kantian-Enlightenment direction of universalization. It is to make a shift to an entirely different *Seinsgeschick*, or sociology, which claims that no one is a means, that every one is an end-in-itself, and which does not define people "functionally."[8]

The other alternative would be to start somewhere else, not with Aristotle but with Christ. And that is what MacIntyre comes close to doing in the sequel to *After Virtue*.

1. 2 *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

If the argument of this book is successful, by the time that the reader discovers its purpose that purpose will have been accomplished. For what is withheld until the final pages is that the second part of MacIntyre's trilogy is primarily addressed to "someone who, not as yet having given their allegiance to some coherent tradition of enquiry, is besieged by disputes over what is just and how it is reasonable to act, both at the level of particular immediate issues . . . and at the level at which rival systematic tradition-informed conceptions contend." (WJ 393) And by this time, provided that the encounter with "a coherent presentation of one particular tradition of rational enquiry" has induced the intended "shock of recognition," (WJ 394) the reader will be thinking, "*this* is not only . . . what I now take to be true but in some measure what I have always taken to be true."

> What such a person has been presented with is a scheme of overall belief within which many, if not all, of his or her particular established beliefs fall into place, a set of modes of action and of interpretative canons for action which exhibit his or her mode of reasoning about action as intelligible and justifiable in a way or to a degree which has not previously been the case, and the history of a tradition of which the narrated and enacted history of his or her life so far forms an intelligible part. (WJ 394)

At the core of MacIntyre's "contemporary restatement" of that tradition is a demonstration of its capacity to provide a set of rational procedures by which to decide between the rival paradigms competing for our custom, a capacity which confirms its own superiority. The problem is that there is no tradition-independent way of deciding what such procedures might be, or whether in fact they exist at all. Despite the modern fiction of academic neutrality - a result of the rift between a public realm of facts and a private realm of values - there are no universally accepted standards of rationality. It is possible, however, to identify two distinct alternatives, and MacIntyre traces the history of their conflict from Homer to the present day. This requires an expanded account of his distinction between the goods which are internal or external to practices, the goods of excellence versus those of effectiveness. In the context of the practice of moral enquiry, he associates rational excellence with the Platonic-Socratic dialectic, while the goods of effectiveness are the objectives of the art of rhetoric taught by the sophists. What is at stake is the practice of politics - the ranking and distribution of goods within the *polis* - and whether it should be conducted according to the standards of excellence or those of effectiveness.

The key virtue in the constitution of any political community is justice. Defined in terms of the goods of excellence, prior to the establishment of the rules designed to secure that outcome, "[j]ustice is a disposition to give each person, including oneself, what that person deserves and to treat no one in a way incompatible with their deserts." (WJ 39) In terms of the goods of effectiveness, by contrast, the concept of justice has no content prior to the formation of enforceable rules, so that "the virtue of justice is nothing other than a disposition to obey those rules." (WJ 39) And according to the sophists, the rules of justice are whatever the rich and powerful say they are (WJ 69). Thus:

> it emerges that what is accounted *a good reason for action* is very different for those for whom the context of practical reasoning is provided by a form of activity specified by one or more of the goods of excellence from what is provided by an understanding of social life as an arena in which each individual and group of individuals seek to maximize the satisfaction of his or her own wants and needs. (WJ 43)

The crucial difference between these rival conceptions is that the justice of effectiveness collapses the distinction between what seems good or best to a particular individual or faction and what is good or best as such. "The sophists anticipated their modern apologists in denying that any standard of right action is to be found which is independent of the wants, satisfactions, and preferences of individual human beings." (WJ 74)

While Plato argued that successful engagement in dialectical argument depends on those virtues of character which contribute to rightful ordering of both the individual psyche and the *polis* as a whole, his opponents preferred to rely on rhetoric, for the hegemony of a particular faction depends on its ability to make its own interests seem natural and universal. Rhetoric is defined as "a mode of nonrational manipulation," (WJ 70) designed to exploit the unreformed hopes and fears of the masses. Hence Plato's well-known hostility to poetry and drama, which MacIntyre justifies by explaining that "it is only when questions of justice and practical rationality are posed together, as they can only be within the genres of philosophical enquiry, that either set of questions becomes answerable." (WJ 63) What Plato and his opponents have in common with their modern counterparts is that each side starts from a premise that their opponent does not accept, and while they may both be consistent in terms of their own premises, neither can refute the other in terms acceptable to both sides (WJ 75). Not only do they appeal to incompatible conceptions of human nature, but any such characterisation of emotions and desires must already presuppose some underlying morality or rank-ordering of goods and evils (WJ 76-7). Both sides claim that their own conception is true to nature, but the Platonic tradition specifies the nature of a thing in terms of its *telos* (WJ 77), while the sophists and their modern descendants refuse to recognise the concept of man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature.

If Plato was ultimately unsuccessful in finding a way to vindicate his account of justice against its rivals (WJ 83) it was because he fell short of what MacIntyre defines as the final stage of the progress of a rational enquiry, conceived as a movement toward the kind of objective truth that the sophist repudiates. A successful enquiry will exhibit a progressive degree of coherence and explanatory power (WJ 79-80), constantly revising and refining itself until it finally attains to an adequate conception of its first principle, or *archê*, which is also its *telos*:

> adequately specified as it can only be at the point at which enquiry is substantially complete, it will be possible to deduce from it every relevant truth concerning the subject matter of the enquiry; and to explain the lower-order truths will precisely be to specify the deductive, causal and explanatory relationships which link them to the *archê* and which show that, given the nature of the *archê*, they would not be other than they are. (WJ 80)

The project that Plato left unfinished was completed and corrected by Aristotle (WJ 85), who was able to furnish an account both of the *archê* of rational enquiry and of the way in which practical judgements can be related to that *archê*.

The *archê* or Form of justice, which remained for Plato an unattainable ideal, is nowhere present for Aristotle apart from its partial and imperfect embodiment in the best of actually existing forms of political association. The ideal is inferred from the actual by means of *epagogê* or inductive reasoning, and its veracity tested in the course of dialectical engagement with the best possible objections that can be advanced from rival standpoints (WJ 91). "And it is of course because there are a variety of rival and conflicting opinions, opinions

that direct enquiry and guide action in different and incompatible ways, that it is crucial not to remain at the level of *empeiria*, experience of particulars . . . but instead attain knowledge of the *archai, nous*." (WJ 92) The *archê* can then be specified as the major premise of a practical syllogism, which always takes the form: "'Since the *telos* and the best is such and such' (*NE* [*Nicomachean Ethics*] 1144a 31-33)" (WJ 93) Guided by *phronêsis* (practical intelligence), *epagogê* constructs an ascending hierarchy of 'for the sake of' relationships leading to the *archê*, which in turn provides the premise for a descending hierarchy of deduction to the particular means and circumstances that furnish secondary premises for the action which follows (WJ 132). The relation between *phronêsis* and the *archê* of enquiry and right action is a dialectic of mutual correction (WJ 118). And since practical intelligence can only be developed in conjunction with the virtues of character, right judgement is inseparable from the virtue of justice (WJ 101).

The good specified in the major premise of a particular syllogism is only a genuine good if it is derivable from the *archê* and contributes to the *telos* which constitute the good for human beings as such. The most adequate conception of the highest good is that which provides the principles for the best possible form of political organization. In the context of moral enquiry, it is the *archê* of whatever system can account for the widest range of moral phenomena (WJ 117).Only the supreme good is valued for itself alone; subordinate goods are its constitutive parts. Aristotle calls it *theoria*, or contemplation of the highest:

> The virtue with which the good man discharges his social roles carries him forward finally to the perfecting of his own soul in contemplative activity. And the goods internal to contemplative activity, those achieved when human intelligence apprehends that for whose sake all else in the universe exists and so completes its own activity, are such that in the light of them the excellencies achieved in exercising the rest of virtue - those of the life of political virtue . . . are recognised as secondary (*NE* 1178a9). (WJ 108)

In keeping with the structure of practical rationality outlined above, the best kind of *polis* will be a hierarchy in which those at the top will have completed their moral education and can therefore be expected to exercise the most adequate conception of justice (WJ 105-6). There needs to be a consensus about the way contributions to political life should be measured, so that inequalities in merit can be met by a proportional distribution of rewards and punishments (WJ 119). To be separated from the life of the *polis* is to be deprived of the possibility of both justice and practical rationality, for it is only through association with others that we learn to develop our potential for virtue and practical intelligence. An individual who is isolated from normal social roles and functions is lacking in essential human attributes (WJ 96-8). We are pre-eminently political and rational animals, and since what is good for me as an individual amounts to what is good for me as member of a *polis*, the central dilemma of modern morality - the conflict between egoism and altruism (AV 229), or individual and State - does not arise within the context of Aristotelian politics.

It is important to emphasise the open-endedness that MacIntyre attributes this scheme, as a science still in the process of construction (WJ 100). Against Descartes, he rejects the possibility of self-justifying first principles (foundationalism), while against Hegel, he insists that the dialectical procedures which establish, test and correct the premises of philosophical enquiry never come to rest in a conclusive formulation but remain always open to revision, enlargement or refutation (WJ 360-1). This is what constitutes a tradition of enquiry. The most significant revision of his own thesis is MacIntyre's reappraisal of the importance of Aquinas, who now succeeds Aristotle as the hero of his narrative. For it is the synthesis achieved by Aquinas between the initially incompatible schemes of Aristotle and Augustine that provides MacIntyre with a template for overcoming conflicts between traditions. What made this possible was the open-ended nature of the mode of enquiry employed in the construction of the *Summa Theologiae*, which allows each set of questions and answers to take the argument "as far as it needs to be taken in the light of what Aquinas knew of the discussions of each particular argument so far but leaves it open to be taken further." (WJ 164)

That there is a basis for agreement between Aristotle and Augustine is established by St. Paul's letter to the Romans, which acknowledged the ability of human reason to apprehend the existence and attributes of God (Romans 1, 18-23), as well the reality and content of a universal, divinely-ordained natural law (Romans 2, 14-15), exemplified in the Decalogue but also exhibited by the legal codes of the gentiles (WJ 152). It would become a central task for later theologians to construct a framework in which "the greatest achievements in formulating the requirements of justice in the Greco-Roman world" could be integrated into the conceptual framework of Christianity, a task to which Augustine made a decisive contribution (WJ 152). Augustine shared Aristotle's teleological conception of the virtues, and his conception of justice was hospitable to the Aristotelian principle of proportional desert (WJ 162), but his teleology extended beyond this life to the cohabitation of the soul with God in eternity, and his catalogue of virtues (WJ 163) gave priority to humility and charity, both of which depart from the mean between giving or taking more or less than one's due that defines the Aristotelian virtues. Augustine's *civitas Dei* - "that divinely ordained form of community into which every human being is summoned to find his or her due place and within which every human being may finally receive, not his or her desert but something far better" (WJ 153) - considerably enlarges the scope of justice and the goods of political life (from which women, artisans, slaves and outsiders were excluded in the Aristotelian *polis*), to embrace all those prepared to abide by its laws (WJ 163). Even its worldly counterpart is divinely ordained, despite being rooted in sin. Although secular government arises out of ambition and greed, it also acts as a necessary curb on them (WJ 162). (Like its internalized accomplice, the Freudian superego, coercive government is a manifestation of the same force it exists to suppress.) Finally, the whole scheme rests on a radically different psychology of the genesis of action, one which

disrupts the operation of the practical syllogism by inserting the concept of the will between the reasons the syllogism gives for action and the action itself, potentially crippling the power of rational decision (*prohairesis*). "That conception of the will was Augustine's - invention? Or discovery?" (WJ 156) Thus Augustine is able to provide an alternative account of *akrasia*, or the failure to act on the premises supplied by right judgement - which Aristotle had to attribute to deficient or incomplete education (WJ 128) - by adding to the conception of man-as-he-is the handicap of a defective will.

Augustine accepts the Neoplatonic view that the form of justice exists in the mind as the measure of right action, but its intellectual apprehension is not by itself enough to generate such action (WJ 152). Contrary to Plato and Aristotle, it is not the reason which directs and orders the desires, but the will, whose freedom was so impaired and corrupted by the Fall that it can only be redeemed by grace (WJ 157). Far from displaying the aristocratic magnanimity of the best kind of Aristotelian citizen, the appropriate disposition for a creature of God is humility, for only through submission to the will of God can its freedom be restored and redirected toward the form of justice.

> To direct our love . . . toward that form is something which we are only able to achieve when our love is directed toward a life which perfectly embodies that form in its actions, the life of Jesus Christ. The particularities of that life alone can evoke from us a response of love which is both love directed toward that particular person and toward the form of justice." (WJ 154)

Thus the *archê* of Aristotelian rationality is effectively displaced by the person and life of Christ, while the work of *epagogê* now has to be accomplished by faith:

> The rationality of right action - and right action does indeed, on Augustine's view, conform to the rational standards provided by the forms which the intellect apprehends - is not its primary determinant, but a secondary consequence of right willing. Hence faith which initially moves and informs the will is prior to understanding; what understanding can provide is a rational justification for having initially believed or done what faith enjoined, but such justification must always be retrospective. Prospective rationality, understood very much as Plato had understood it, is then possible for the faith-informed intellect, further informing the will which had directed it into its state of faith (with the necessary work of grace) and continues so to direct it. (WJ 158)

Although Aristotle's account of practical reason remains virtually intact when incorporated into this framework, Augustine's discovery of the will "shows it to be incomplete in a way which involves radical defectiveness." (WJ 193)

Augustine's expansion of the available moral vocabulary made possible an increase in self-awareness which led in turn to further complexification. His successors found that a doctrine of intention and conscience was needed "both to achieve self-awareness in action and to evaluate accountability for lack of it." (WJ 183) So when Aquinas was working at the task of assimilating the newly rediscovered works of Aristotle he needed to make room for the mediaeval concepts of *intentio, conscientia* and *synderesis* - this last being the name for our innate and immediate apprehension of the most basic precepts of natural law (WJ 184-5). The

application to particular situations of the principles disclosed by *synderesis* is the work of *conscientia*, which is binding yet liable to error. Whereas, in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre found Aquinas' table of virtues too tightly unified to admit the possibility of a tragic conflict of goods, he now accepts that such a conflict is always the result of a contradiction between some truth correctly identified by *synderesis* and a mistaken deliverance of *conscientia* (WJ 186-7). "It is *prudentia* (*phronêsis*) which is the virtue without which judgement and action in particular occasions are resourceless beyond the bare level of what *synderesis* provides." (WJ 196) What *synderesis* and *conscientia* contribute to Aristotle's account of practical reason are "the principles initially needed, principles whose content and application are more and more adequately understood in the course of our education and self-education into the virtues." (WJ 194) This overcomes the circularity of the dialectic of induction and deduction, in which right judgement depends on an understanding of the good that is itself the product of right judgement. For Aquinas, *prudentia* has a theological dimension that is lacking in Aristotle's *phronêsis*:

> *Prudentia* is exercised with a view to the ultimate end of human beings (*S.T.* II-IIae, 47, 4), and it is the counterpart in human beings to that ordering of creatures to their ultimate end which is God's providence (*S.T.* Ia, 22, 1). God creates and orders particulars and knows them precisely as what he has made and is making. We, if we act rightly, reproduce that ordering. (WJ 196)

Justice too has a theological dimension, and its primary application is as one of the names of God, although Aquinas's account of how the concept is acquired remains Aristotelian in that it starts with observance of the norms that prevail in existing societies (WJ 198-9). This does not mean that we are expected to put up with corrupt or unjust legal structures; though what is wrong with them is not that they prevent individuals from pursuing their own freely-chosen ends as prescribed in the modern liberal conception of government. "What is bad about tyranny is that it subverts the virtues of its subjects; the best regime is that whose order best conduces to education into the virtues in the interest of all." (WJ 201)

The most significant difference between Aristotle and Aquinas concerns the relation between the virtues and natural law. For Aquinas, "The central human experience of natural law . . . is of our inability to live by it," (WJ 205) which is why his account of the natural virtues "had to have as its prologue an inquiry into the supernatural virtues."

> For just as and because justice is continually the victim of the vice and sin of pride, so justice cannot flourish, cannot indeed . . . even exist as a natural virtue, except and insofar as it is informed by the supernatural virtue of *caritas*. Charity is the form of all virtue; without charity the virtues would lack the specific kind of directedness which they require. And charity is not to be acquired by moral education; it is a gift of grace, flowing from the work of Christ through the office of the Holy Spirit (*S.T.* IIa-IIae, 23 to 44). (WJ 205)

The defectiveness of Aristotle's account is a reflection of "a radical defectiveness in that natural human order of which Aristotle gave his account." (WJ 205) But here comes

MacIntyre's escape clause: "What is clear nonetheless is that Aquinas' account is only fully intelligible, let alone defensible, as it emerges from an extended and complex tradition of argument and conflict," (WJ 205) a tradition whose pagan input is more or less on a par with its Christian component. The subsequent decline of this tradition is due in part to the error of later Thomists in trying to argue with the philosophers of Enlightenment in terms of the criteria of Enlightenment philosophy (WJ 207).

If the first half of *Whose Justice?* charts the progress of a tradition in good order, the second half plots the rise of modern liberalism, which only merits the title of a tradition insofar as its internal disagreements have artificially prolonged its career. First, MacIntyre describes the decline of Aristotelian and Augustinian studies in the Scottish university during the period in which the Cartesian 'way of ideas' was gaining ascendancy. The villain of this episode is David Hume, whom MacIntyre holds largely responsible for the subversion of the social and moral fabric of early modern society (WJ 280-325). The power of his philosophy can be partly attributed to certain features it shares with that of Aristotle. Both are firmly rooted in the social and political order of their day, but the society reflected and endorsed by Hume had already lost the coherence of a shared teleology and a common conception of the good. Instead, he treats some of the dominant features of eighteenth century English (as opposed to Scottish) society as universal properties of human nature (WJ 296).

> Aristotle's presupposed social context is one in which evaluation is primarily in terms of the achievement of the ends of activity; Hume's is one in which evaluation is primarily in terms of the satisfaction of consumers. The individual envisaged by Aristotle engages in practical reasoning not just *qua* individual, but *qua* citizen, of a *polis*; the individual as envisaged by Hume engages in practical reasoning *qua* member of a type of society in which rank, property, and pride structure social exchanges. (WJ 298)

Hume became the philosopher for a culture that was becoming increasingly reluctant to submit its practices to either philosophical or theological scrutiny. On the basis of an epistemology which is reduced to deriving universals from immediate perceptions, his account of practical reason turns the practical syllogism upside down. The major premise now specifies some aspect of the actual rather than the ideal, proposing some object of desire as the reason for acting, while the role of the minor premise is filled by various conditional clauses that demand inclusion in the calculation of means: "I want it to be the case that such and such; Doing so and so will enable me to achieve such and such; There is no other way of so enabling me which I prefer; Doing so and so will not frustrate any equal or stronger preference." (WJ 340) Reason is now the servant of the appetites. "Reasoning about the passions - reasoning which must of course itself be motivated by some passion - enables us to identify the types of occasions on which by satisfying some passion or passions immediately, I may in fact prevent myself from achieving the more extensive and enduring satisfaction of my passions of which I am in fact capable." (WJ 309) This reversal of the relation between reason and passion permits *pleonexia* (the Aristotelian vice of acquisitiveness) to be installed in the place previously

occupied by the good and the best (WJ 313). What made all this possible was the epistemological turn of philosophy after Descartes, who established the primacy of the first-person point of view as the foundation of all reasoning (WJ 270).

The liberal tradition systematically postpones its demise by failing to provide a coherent framework for the rational discussion or ordering of ends. Its claim to provide an arena for the co-existence of widely disparate conceptions of the good rests on the spurious assumption that its own understanding of practical reason is the timeless form of practical reasoning as such (WJ 340), and that its rational procedures provide a neutral court of appeal for the settlement of political and moral disputes. But just as there are no such things as pre-theoretical facts (WJ 333) there can be "no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing, evaluating, accepting, and rejecting reasoned argument apart from that which is provided by some tradition or another." (WJ 350) The outcome of repeated attempts to formulate such a tradition-free position has been a history of endlessly unresolved disputes which has served to uphold the social order of which it is the expression (WJ 349), so that liberalism, "beginning as a repudiation of tradition in the name of abstract, universal principles of reason, turned itself into a politically embodied power, whose inability to bring its debates on the nature and context of those universal principles to a conclusion has had the unintended effect of transforming liberalism into a tradition." (WJ 349) (In a regime that thrives on systematic disagreement and the endless postponement of decisions about rival conceptions of the good, it is not surprising that choice itself, defined as freedom, comes to represent the supreme value.) Like other traditions, liberalism has its own conception of the good (its continued survival), its own authoritative texts, and a hierarchical power structure in which the range of political and economic options is determined by an elite that relies heavily on the cosmetic arts of presentation (WJ 345). In a society where preferences reign supreme, bargaining power rather than merit or need is the decisive factor in the distribution of goods. "The disadvantaged in a liberal society are those without the means to bargain." (WJ 336)

The apparent unresolvability of philosophical disagreements, the absence of a neutral court of appeal, the disorder of a moral vocabulary composed of the fragments and simulacra of incompatible schemes, the existence side by side of rival traditions of enquiry, all these things conspire to invite a relativistic conclusion regarding the existence of truth. As we shall see, MacIntyre's defence of realism rests chiefly on his formula for resolving philosophical conflicts, which is presented most succinctly in the final part of his trilogy, but it is important to notice his claim that the challenges of relativism and perspectivism can only be issued from a standpoint outside all traditions (WJ 367).

> The person outside all traditions . . . has no adequate relevant means of rational evaluation and hence can come to no well-grounded conclusion, including the conclusion that no tradition can vindicate itself against any other. To be outside all traditions is to be a stranger to enquiry; it is to be in a state of intellectual and moral destitution, a condition from which it is impossible to issue the relativist challenge. (WJ 367)

Nietzsche was well aware that engagement in rational debate would entangle him in the logical procedures that he was trying to repudiate (WJ 368), hence his fondness for aphorisms, which rely on the effectiveness of rhetoric rather than dialectical excellence. For MacIntyre, the current vogue for this kind of thinking is a clear indication that *anomie*, once characterized by Durkheim as a symptom of the breakdown of traditional social relations (WJ 368), is now celebrated as an achievement:

> This self-defined success becomes in different versions the freedom from bad faith of the Sartrian individual who rejects determinate social roles, the homelessness of Deleuze's nomadic thinker, and the presupposition of Derrida's choice between remaining "within," although a stranger to, the already constructed social and intellectual edifice, but only in order to deconstruct it from within, or brutally placing oneself outside in a condition of rupture and discontinuity. What Durkheim saw as social pathology is now presented wearing the masks of philosophical pretension. (WJ 368-9)

In fairness to Derrida, it should be pointed out that MacIntyre is guilty here of what he elsewhere proscribes, i.e., distorting the meaning of a proposition by isolating it from the context of the larger argument of which it forms a part (WJ 164), and thus contradicting his own justification for the systematic character of philosophical enquiry. The target of his comments is the postmodern tendency to regard the whole of western philosophy as an oppressive monolith which ought to be overthrown. In the passage to which he refers, the context which justifies this view is Derrida's discussion of the relationship of western philosophy to its other. The breakdown of traditional social relations is attributed to an inherent instability in their teleological formation, which "has never done anything but modulate the equivocality of the *end*, in the play of *telos* and death." (MP 134) An example of this would be Heidegger's insistence[9] that philosophy has found its proper 'end' in the sciences, and in the technocratic ordering of the kind of manipulative social relations vilified by MacIntyre in *After Virtue*. But according to Derrida, the impetus which today is causing these structures to 'tremble' comes from outside. "This trembling is played out in the violent relationship of the whole of the West to its other, whether a 'linguistic' relationship (where very quickly the question of the limits of everything leading back to the question of Being arises), or ethnological, economic, political, military." (MP 134-5) In *The Gift of Death*, this phenomenon will be interpreted in the light of the 'fear and trembling' of the Kierkegaardian 'knight of faith' before the *mysterium tremendum* of Christianity, while the disruption of the *oikonomia* of classical ethics will be linked to an alternative economy of sacrifice: "Kierkegaard quotes Luke 14: 26: 'If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and his wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple'." (GD 64) But in the earlier passage cited above Derrida suggests that this state of affairs leaves the philosopher with two alternatives. The option of 'remaining within' refers to the kind of immanent critique undertaken by Heidegger, but the description is equally suited to MacIntyre, even if his own critique extends no further than the

Enlightenment. The problem with this strategy is that "one risks ceaselessly confirming, consolidating, relifting (*relever*), at an always more certain depth, that which one allegedly deconstructs." (MP 135) And according to James Bradley, this is exactly what MacIntyre has achieved. "While many of his specific criticisms of that amalgam of attitudes which he calls 'liberalism' are telling and effective, he seems unaware of the extent to which his own position can be taken as a brilliant corrective redefinition of liberalism, i.e. as a far more adequate account of the nature of debate and decision-making than liberalism has hitherto possessed."[10]

1. 3 *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition, being Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh in 1988*

The purpose for which the Adam Gifford lectures were originally founded in 1888 was to carry forward a programme of systematic enquiry into natural theology, "understood as comprehending within itself enquiry into the foundations of ethics." (TRV 10) Gifford confidently expected this enquiry to proceed in much the same way as that of the natural sciences, but unlike the study of chemistry or astronomy his project can hardly be said to have made any noticeable progress, if only because there is no common standard by which such progress might be measured. Nor is it any longer possible to integrate the multiplicity of enquiries pursued within the modern university into anything like Gifford's conception of natural theology as "'the greatest of all possible sciences, indeed, in a sense, the only science'." (TRV 23) "So the question arises: are Gifford lectures any longer possible?" (TRV 24) As soon as the question is raised it becomes evident that one of the modes of enquiry named in the title of the book can already be ruled out. For if the question means 'Is an enquiry of the kind envisaged by Gifford still possible?' the answer is 'No'. Now that we know the history of science and rationality to be one of radical discontinuities and ruptures we can no longer subscribe to the belief in the inevitability of progress which Gifford shared with the compilers of the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*. Nor we can share their vision of "a comprehensive, rationally incontestable scientific understanding of the whole, in which the architectonic of the sciences matched that of the cosmos," (TRV 24) for there are just too many rival conceptions of rationality. But if the question means "'Is a systematic and fruitful enquiry, historically continuous with those of traditional natural theology, including the foundation of ethics, but of some other very different kind from that envisaged by Adam Gifford still possible?' then we are confronted with an impressive contemporary case for answering 'No', but also a contemporary case . . . for answering 'Yes'." (TRV 24) On the basis of the answers to these questions, MacIntyre is able to reduce his three rival modes of enquiry to the two remaining contenders with which this book is really concerned: Genealogy and Tradition, Nietzsche versus MacIntyre.

Each mode of enquiry can be characterised in terms of its approach to the problem of philosophical disagreement, the problem which constitutes an epitaph to Gifford's project, yet at the same time prevents its demise from being universally acknowledged. Like the Hegelian myth of evolution, the encyclopaedist's narrative was shaped by the notion that traditional beliefs have now been superseded by the timeless principles that inform the rational present (TRV 78). It follows that any incommensurability between rival modes of enquiry can be no more than a temporary illusion, for "[t]o be able to recognize some alien system of belief and practice as in contention with one's own always requires a capacity to translate its terms and idioms into one's own and an acknowledgement of its theses, arguments, and procedures as susceptible of judgement and evaluation by the same standards as one's own." (TRV 5) By collecting a comprehensive catalogue of facts, the encyclopaedists aspired to an objective overview of natural and human affairs that would supplant the canonical status of the Bible (TRV 19). While MacIntyre agrees with Nietzsche in rejecting this standpoint, in the founding document of genealogy - *Zur Genealogie der Moral* - the latter not only attacked the Bible but sought to discredit the notion of an authoritative canon altogether. On this view, there are no common norms or standards for the adjudication of disagreements between competing versions of reality. "Such systems are incommensurable, and the terms in and by means of which judgement is delivered in each are so specific and idiosyncratic to each that they cannot be translated into the terms of the other without gross distortion." (TRV 5) If the epistemology of the Encyclopaedia collapses incommensurability into incompatibility, genealogy does the reverse. Like the will to truth which drives science and technology, the illusion of a unitary, objective reality is a legacy of Christianity and Platonism, and the mask of authority, whether rational or divine, is simply an expedient of the will to power, the urge to dominate others (TRV 66). Realism itself is always a symptom of an underlying theology, and in clinging to the metaphysics of appearance and reality the encyclopaedists remain irredeemably infected with the moral and intellectual sickness of the tradition they have rejected (TRV 67).

By contrast with both the above, the 'traditional' mode of enquiry regards the past neither as a mere prologue to the rational present nor as something to be exposed and repudiated, but as "that from which we have to learn if we are to identify and move towards our *telos*." (TRV 79) Its crowning achievement is the Thomist synthesis of Aristotle and Augustine, from which MacIntyre derives a third approach to philosophical disagreements. His claim is that "an admission of significant incommensurability and untranslatability in the relations between two opposed systems of thought and practice can be a prologue not only to rational debate, but to that kind of debate from which one party can emerge as undoubtedly rationally superior." (TRV 5) If Thomism can supply the resources to overcome radical philosophical disagreements, this opens up the possibility of a "radical renovation" of Adam Gifford's project (TRV 24) while at the same time providing the means to "preserve and justify

the canonical status of the Bible as distinct from, yet hegemonic over, all secular enquiry." (TRV 25)

Whereas the naive objectivism of the encyclopaedists was rooted in the conviction that a prior commitment to some particular set of beliefs is an obstacle to rational enquiry, in MacIntyre's view it is the precondition of such an enquiry. Like Augustine, he upholds the fundamental role of authority, both in presiding over the beginning of an enquiry and in guiding its later stages (TRV 91-2). Since understanding is preceded by belief, a moral education follows the course of a hermeneutical circle in which I learn to understand those authoritative texts which interpret the story of my life by trusting in the authority delegated by God to my teachers (TRV 92). As the author both of holy Scripture and of the history it relates, "God is the authoritative interpreter of his meanings." (TRV 94) But He also works from within, illuminating every apprehension and judgement, "not only as omnipresent creator but as constituting that act of apprehension or judgement." (TRV 95) Since God, as the source of the mind's illumination, is the guarantor of truth, in asserting that the secular creed of scientific realism betrays a covert belief in God, "Nietzsche simply inverted the Augustinian standpoint; without God there is no genuine objectivity of interpretation or conceptualization." (TRV 98)

It would seem that such a self-contained system leaves little room for innovation. So when the Aristotelian corpus appeared on the scene in the thirteenth century, the Augustinian tradition was presented with an epistemological dilemma. Failure to integrate the Aristotelian sciences would fatally compromise its hegemony over the curriculum, but to accept Aristotle would throw the whole scheme into confusion (TRV 109). The problem of understanding an alien scheme appears initially to be a problem of how to translate it in terms of one's own (TRV 113). At this stage, there is no way to distinguish incompatibility from incommensurability. Whatever cannot be translated will tend to be dismissed as unintelligible, while that which has been translated will have been rendered compatible or incompatible with the positions of the system into which it has been imported. The extent to which a concept may have been distorted in the process of translation will only be visible to someone who is equally at home in two schemes at once, a native speaker of two first languages (TRV 114), a person such as Aquinas, who immersed himself both in Aristotelianism and Augustinianism "so as to make a central problem, not only of his intellectual enquiries, but of his existence, that of how what he took . . . to be the truth in each could be reconciled with that of the other." (TRV 115). When it comes to resolving the problem of incommensurability in general, however, MacIntyre always invokes a particular example from the history of science, namely, the displacement of Aristotle's impetus theory by the physics of Galileo and Newton (TRV 118-120).[11] What this demonstrates is that a scheme of thought and practice can be defeated both by its own standards and by the standards of one of its rivals. Although one cannot argue from within the former position to the conclusions made available by the latter, it is possible to

argue retrospectively in the other direction. "So the physics of Newton can explain why impetus theory *had* to fail in its projects at just the points at which it did indeed fail, something which impetus theory itself lacked the resources to explain." (TRV 119) This retrospective reasoning not only justifies the new paradigm but also the prospective reasoning that made it possible, and which "cannot but be dialectical, exploratory, inventive, and provisional, formulating hypotheses as it moves towards a new set of first principles and fundamental conceptions." (TRV 119)

This is where imagination comes in. In attempting to resolve the problems which arise at those points where two rival schemes provide alternative accounts of reality, appealing to empirical data yields too meagre a description to decide the issue (TRV112). But by imaginatively entering into an alien culture it is possible to envision one's own from a radically different perspective, and even to be persuaded of its relative inadequacy. The crucial point, however, is that this is not simply a matter of subjective preference. The fact that a tradition can be rationally defeated demonstrates the validity of a conception of truth as something external to and independent of the alternative schemes on offer, for judging between them always involves a reference beyond the criteria which determine what can be asserted within a particular scheme:

> Truth cannot be identified with, or collapsed into warranted assertability. And a conception of *what is* which is more and other than a conception of *what appears to be the case in the light of the most fundamental criteria governing assertability within any particular scheme* is correspondingly required, that is, a metaphysics of being, of *esse*, over and above whatever can be said about particular *entia* in the light of particular concepts. (TRV 122)

In the system constructed by Aquinas, epistemology is inseparable from ontology and ethics, so that evaluative judgements are also factual judgements (TRV 134). The names of God - Being, Truth and Goodness - are interchangeable, even if Being seems to be accorded a certain logical priority. These predicates apply only causally and analogically to beings, whose movements are rendered intelligible by relating them to their first and final cause, the unmoved mover which is both the source from which they flow and the end in which they are perfected (TRV 123). It was the framework of analogical and causal relations developed in the *Quinque Viae* that made it possible for Aquinas to combine the schemes of Aristotle and Augustine in such a way as to correct their respective shortcomings, so that Aristotle's account of nature was shown to need Augustine's supernatural theology to complete it, and "Aristotle's account of the rational world became recognizably the prologue required for an Augustinian theology." (TRV 123) Even the radical disruption of Aristotle's account of practical reason brought about by Augustine's disclosure of the complicity of the will in evil turns out to be an inestimable benefit, for the acceptance of our inability to live by the precepts of natural law is a necessary condition for our reception of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity (TRV 140).

> The self-revelation of God in the events of the scriptural history and the gratuitous grace through which that revelation is appropriated, so that an individual can come to recognize

> his or her place within that same history, enable such individuals to recognize also that prudence, justice, temperateness, and courage are genuine virtues, that the apprehension of natural law was not illusory, and that the moral life up to this point requires to be corrected in order to be completed but not displaced. So a Pauline and Augustinian account retrospectively vindicate that in Aristotle which had provided a first understanding of the core of the moral life. (TRV 140-1)

Subtract Aristotle from Aquinas, and all that is left is the moral despair and the helpless reliance on gratuitous grace which MacIntyre associates with Luther (TRV 141), and attributes to the voluntarist turn inaugurated by Duns Scotus and William of Occam (TRV 152-5). In order to preserve God's ability to override the laws of his creation, and to account for the freedom of the will to defy God, Scotus rejected the Thomist account of practical reason in which the will, once it has been reformed by grace, is able to return to the hypothetical imperative of the practical syllogism - "If and since to do so and so is the best for such-and-such a specific type of person in these particular circumstances and you are just such a person, then you ought to do so and so." (TRV 193) By detaching the foundation of moral obligation from the teleological framework of natural law and locating it exclusively in the categorical imperative of divine commands (TRV 163), Occam paved the way for Kantian deontology (TRV 155). Following his explicit rejection of the possibility of a unified theory of everything (Prologue, *Expositio super viii libros physicorum*), "Enquiry itself became irreducibly multiple and heterogeneous in a way that excluded any genuine architectonic of the sciences." (TRV 161-2) Meanwhile, the growing rift between faith and reason resulting from the break-up of the Thomist synthesis set the scene for philosophy to follow theology into obscurity. "So it is not merely the inroads of specialization which are responsible for the disunity of the curriculum; the dethronement of moral philosophy, like the dethronement of theology in an earlier period, would in any case have deprived the curriculum of any but pragmatic principles of ordering." (TRV 227)

The other reason cited for the downfall of Thomism is the distortion of Aquinas' teachings by his fellow Dominican, Meister Eckhart. In 1325 Eckhart defended himself against the charge of heresy by claiming to be a Thomist. "But it is precisely because and insofar as he was not that he has exerted such influence on a variety of later non-Thomist and anti-Thomist thinkers, most notably on Hegel and Heidegger." (TRV 165-6). Despite their indisputable standing at the fountainhead of the German language, it is Eckhart's vernacular sermons that provide the target for MacIntyre's invective.

> It is in the sermons that we find Eckhart's anticipation of Heidegger's theses that it is not true that we use language in speaking of being, but that instead being speaks to us in language, being which is to be named, or rather which is to deliver itself, only through nonargumentative modes of speech, in which the categorizations, conceptualizations, and genres of systematic enquiry are repudiated as barriers to openness to being. So Eckhart himself carries language to the point at which conceptualization is evaded because sense is violated. (TRV 166)

Eckhart's achievement is depicted as a triumph of rhetoric over reason, in which the rational edifice of Thomism disintegrates and is replaced by irrationalism in the name of a dubious appeal to mystical experience (TRV 167-8). A method of preaching that favours "rhetorical effectiveness in persuasion and manipulation" over rational excellence exempts the performer from rational accountability. The fideistic tendency that Eckhart introduced into theology runs parallel with the increasing professionalization of academic philosophy, which "makes the rational discussion of questions of fundamental import the prerogative of an academic elite" (TRV 168). Thus fideism and scientism are two sides of the same coin, and evangelical fundamentalism is a counterpart to the sterile, exclusive rationalism of modern academic philosophy (TRV 168-9).

If Thomism is to be vindicated against its modern and postmodern rivals it will have to be by its ability to include them in a history of ethical enquiry that is able to account for their defects in terms which are unavailable within the limits of their own conceptual resources. As we have seen, MacIntyre's critique of the encyclopaedist standpoint agrees with the genealogist's as far as unmasking its pretensions to universality, but stops well short of narrating the entire history of ethics as a succession of stratagems adopted by the will to power (TRV 190-5). "Where Nietzsche saw the individual will as a fiction, as part of a mistaken psychology which conceals from view the impersonal will to power, the Thomist can elaborate out of the materials provided in the *Summa* an account of the will to power as an intellectual fiction disguising the corruption of the will." (TRV 147) The followers of Nietzsche are under pressure to come up with a coherent account of the identity and accountability of the self that engages in the emancipatory activity of unmasking (TRV 214). There is also a question of the extent to which genealogy is merely parasitic, depending for its arguments on the grammar of that which it deconstructs, a question which MacIntyre claims has "rarely, if at all, attracted explicit genealogical scrutiny" (TRV 215) But while he maintains that a general acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the encyclopaedic standpoint is long overdue, he concedes that there may still be some mileage left in genealogy (TRV 215), which is why the book concludes by calling for a radical reorganization of the academic establishment.

Despite the fact that the curriculum is no longer a coherent whole, the liberal university is still based on a set of no longer quite believed background assumptions left over from the era of the Encyclopaedia (TRV 229). The repeal of the religious tests which had excluded dissenters from teaching in the preliberal university was based on the belief "that human rationality is such that, if freed from external constraints and most notably from the constraints imposed by religious and moral tests, it will produce not only progress in enquiry but also agreement among all rational persons as to what the rationally justified conclusions of such an enquiry are." (TRV 225) The runaway success of the natural sciences has since conferred a disproportionate prestige on technique. As a result, the Thomistic mode of enquiry is

systematically excluded from the liberal university, for in areas where technical expertise cannot decide the issue, such as literary interpretation, disagreement has become endemic.

> But the institutional tolerance of limitless disagreement encounters in the areas of morality and theology standpoints which by their very nature cannot accept the indifference presupposed by such tolerance, standpoints which invite rejection rather than toleration. And thus such standpoints have to be at best exiled to the margins of the internal conversations of the liberal university. (TRV 225-6)

In the absence of a unified curriculum, however, there is no longer any justification for the continued existence of the university in its present form (TRV 227). According to MacIntyre, the solution would be to reconfigure its institutional arrangements along the lines of the tripartite conflict analysed in *Three Rival Versions*. The university could then provide "a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict" (TRV 231) both within and between rival traditions, "a twentieth-century version of the thirteenth-century university . . . in which Augustinians and Aristotelians each conducted their own systematic enquiries while at the same time engaging in systematic controversy." (TRV 232) Oddly, in view of his argument against the encyclopaedia, MacIntyre proposes that these ongoing debates should be overseen by impartial referees. In a final rhetorical flourish, he anticipates those who would accuse him of utopianism by calling them "the enemies of the incalculable . . . the deliberately shortsighted who congratulate themselves upon the limits of their vision." (TRV 234) The gap between contemporary social reality and utopian ideality is a measure of their failure to "even identify, let alone confront the problems which will be inscribed on their epitaphs." (TRV 235)

1. 4 *After MacIntyre*

In the passage in *Whose Justice?* where MacIntyre speaks directly to the reader who has yet to decide between the claims of rival traditions, he raises the question of how such a person can make a rational decision in the absence of any tradition-independent criteria. "The initial answer is: that will depend on who you are and how you understand yourself." (WJ 393) Our self-understanding, such as it is, will so far have been shaped by whichever tradition-informed modes of discourse and practice happen to predominate in our concrete social environment. Not surprisingly, MacIntyre identifies three types of reader; let us call them A, B and C. A possesses all the advantages of character and background to be able to recognize "a scheme of overall belief within which many, if not all, of his or her established beliefs fall into place" (WJ 394) when he or she sees one. Any beliefs which turn out to be incompatible with MacIntyre's scheme can only be a product of the faulty reasoning which he holds responsible for the inevitable slide of Enlightenment foundationalism into postmodern *anomie*. This is the predicament of B, "the kind of post-Enlightenment person who responds to the failure of the Enlightenment to provide neutral, impersonal tradition-independent standards of rational

judgement by concluding that no set of beliefs proposed for acceptance is therefore justifiable." (WJ 395) For this type of person, all those aspects of the social and cultural order that exceed the bare requirements of pragmatic[12] necessity must be viewed as "a series of falsifying masquerades," (WJ 395) the expression of arbitrary, unacknowledged acts of will. Alienated from all traditions, and deprived of the rational friendship which is the basis of political community, the condition of the postmodern self is one of "intellectual and moral destitution" (WJ 367). The only hope for such a person, as MacIntyre rightly says, is "a change amounting to a conversion" (WJ 396).

Fortunately perhaps, such people are rarely encountered outside the pages of literary or philosophical fiction, and MacIntyre expects most of his readers to fall "betwixt and between, accepting usually unquestioningly the assumptions of the dominant liberal individualist forms of public life, but drawing in different areas of their lives upon a variety of tradition-generated resources of thought and action, transmitted from a variety of familial, religious, educational, and other social and cultural sources." (WJ 397) Group C is too caught up in "uses of language which move from fragments of one language-in-use through the idioms of internationalized modernity to fragments of another" to bring to the encounter with tradition anything more than "a fundamental incoherence which is too disturbing to be admitted to self-conscious awareness except on the rarest of occasions." (WJ 397) What we need to learn is how to turn our "initial incoherences to argumentative advantage by requiring of each tradition that it supply an account of how these incoherences are best to be characterized, explained, and transcended." (WJ 398) Those accounts should then be tested dialectically, by using the resources of each in turn both to evaluate its rivals and to test the coherence of one's own preconceptions.

> The catalogs of virtues and vices, the norms of conformity and deviance, the accounts of educational success and failure, the narratives of possible types of human life which each tradition has elaborated in its own terms, all these invite the individual educated into self-knowledge of his or her own incoherence to acknowledge in which of these rival modes of moral understanding he or she finds him or herself most adequately explained and accounted for. (WJ 398)

Thus, through an enhanced self-understanding, C is able to become more like A. From the beginning of *After Virtue*, the whole thrust of MacIntyre's argument has been to render the positions of B and C untenable, and even though the conclusion of *Three Rival Versions* calls for all three types to be accommodated in suitable institutions (perhaps he had in mind the kind of institution in which Nietzsche ended his career), this is an expedient designed to hasten the day when his own tradition will emerge triumphant. For despite being couched in terms of an argument for traditions in general, MacIntyre's thesis is an overt attempt to recruit us, not just to the ranks of those who come to recognize their place in one of the traditions on offer, but to that particular tradition whose justification amounts to a proof of the existence of God as the ground of all rationality. The reader is only fully self-conscious and rational to the extent

that he or she has understood (or written) *Whose Justice? Which Morality?* And since the political and moral order of modernity, whether Marxist or capitalist, inevitably collapses into a Nietzschean and Weberian sociology of conflict and manipulation (AV 109), the price of failing to join A is to degenerate into B. MacIntyre's critique of modernity is thus what logicians call *modus tollens*, in this case of the form: 'If C then B; not-B, therefore not-C'. If the unacceptable implication of modernity is the nihilism encapsulated in Nietzsche's announcement of the death (or rather murder) of God, MacIntyre's project can best be described as a theodicy, an unapologetic attempt to rescue the tradition of metaphysical theology from the legion of its detractors, to which end he is not above using genealogical tactics. By his own admission, however, it is precisely the argument between genealogy and tradition which has yet to be resolved, and since the genealogical critique is not, like MacIntyre's, directed at modernity *qua* emancipation from tradition, but rather at its failure to complete that emancipation, what he needs to show is that A does not suffer the same fate as C. And if Jean-Luc Marion is to be believed, this is an impossible task, for "[i]s it not the case that metaphysics, at least in terms of its historical role, reached its positive conclusion with Hegel and its negative with Nietzsche?"[13] The nihilism that MacIntyre wants to push back is not a philosophical position that can be argued away, but, as Nietzsche insisted, an all-encompassing event. "The very fact that one can deny it, and that, in order to do so, one must argue against it and therefore recognize it, is sufficient confirmation."[14]

MacIntyre might reply that his case against C succeeds without any reference to B because he is able to explain, albeit with the help of genealogical arguments, why the Enlightenment project had to fail by its own standards, just as Galilean and Newtonian physics were able to explain "just why and how Aristotelian physics, if developed to a certain point, had to fail in the way that it did."[15] But John Milbank[16] points out that the success of the new physics was not due to its greater comprehensiveness, for there is no independent measure, but to its greater *effectiveness* in providing easily repeatable, mechanical models, a situation which is not in principle irreversible, especially in those fields of enquiry where, as MacIntyre says himself, calculative reasoning and technical expertise are "manifestly not to the point." (TRV 255) "This is where I see much narrower limits to dialectics than MacIntyre does: it is, for me, *never* sufficiently clear that the inherited criteria or rationality within a particular tradition will dictate the embracing of a new tradition (that, surely, is pure Hegelianism)."[17] For Milbank, MacIntyre's fusion of the categories of history and dialectics is thoroughly Hegelian, a charge that MacIntyre anticipates by arguing that the existence of incommensurable schemes confronts their protagonists with a choice between two alternatives: "that of abandoning *any* claim that truth-value can be attached to the fundamental judgements underpinning their mode of enquiry *or* that of making a claim to truth of a kind which appeals beyond their particular scheme of concepts and beliefs, to something external to that scheme." (WJ 170) The difference between Hegelian idealism and MacIntyre's coherence theory of traditioned

rationality is that the former cancels the distinction between truth and warranted assertability, whereas the latter is worked out in the context of a tradition of enquiry that preserves the classical conception of truth as the correspondence between thought and reality. In fact it is a supplement to that tradition, designed to shield it from historical criticism. While Hegel would see MacIntyre's position as a regression to the stage where the perfect correspondence between subject and object is not yet achieved, MacIntyre views Hegel's claim to have achieved that objective as the move that set the scene for the subjectivism and emotivism of contemporary morality. So we are back with a Hobson's choice between A and B, between MacIntyre's 'contemporary restatement' of the classical tradition and the scheme of those without any scheme, "the community of those without community,"[18] the tradition of those who reject all traditions. But the logic of MacIntyre's presentation of these options is again Hegelian, inasmuch as the task is conceived in terms of the reduction of incommensurability (albeit a 'significant degree of incommensurability') to incompatibility by means of the dialectical procedure outlined above. The strategy of positing an 'external' reality only separates him from Hegel for the period that it takes for the conflict between A and B to be resolved.

Assuming that the reader has been fortunate enough to recognize his or her life as an intelligible part of the narrative history related by MacIntyre, what then?

> What rationality then requires of such a person is that he or she confirm or disconfirm over time this initial view of his or her relationship to this particular tradition of enquiry by engaging, to whatever degree is appropriate, both in the ongoing arguments within that tradition and in the argumentative debates and conflicts of that tradition of enquiry with one or more of its rivals. (WJ 394)

With a few partial exceptions, which I will come to in due course (the arguments which are internal to the tradition in question concern MacIntyre's interpretation of Aquinas), the critical essays compiled in *After MacIntyre* belong to the second kind of debate. But since they nearly all try to defend some aspect of the Enlightenment project these arguments are only relevant to mine inasmuch as they maintain that there is a greater degree of continuity between Aristotelian and modern philosophy than MacIntyre allows. However, while most of his critics tend to use this kind of argument to deny the inevitable collapse of the liberal paradigm, I want to argue that 'tradition' suffers the same fate. This is what worries John Haldane, who cites the growing interest amongst students of Aquinas in the kind of philosophy that MacIntyre characterizes as the enemy.

> This might be dismissed as a sociological curiosity, but given MacIntyre's historicism he needs to explain why Thomism has lost out to Nietzsche in North American Catholic institutions of learning (or equivalently, why Gilson, Maritain and Simon have been neglected while Gadamer, Levinas and Derrida have been taken up with enthusiasm). . . . For good or ill (very much the latter, I think) in those places where Thomism can be found, the *zeitgeist* would suggest that if any conception has emerged victorious from an engagement of rival conceptions it is postmodernity rather than premodernity. (AM 100)

The source of most of the misgivings expressed in *After MacIntyre* is pinpointed by Robert Stern: "once one drops Hegel's nineteenth-century faith in the progressive development of consciousness through history, and merely retains his contextualized conception of rationality, then historicism collapses into some form of relativistic scepticism, as there is now no standpoint at the end of history from which previous outlooks can be judged, and in which their culmination can be assured." (AM 146) While too much emphasis on timeless, impersonal structures and essences leads to the Scylla of Hegelian closure, too much open-ended historicism plunges us into the Charybdis of relativism. Insofar as MacIntyre successfully resists the former, his position becomes vulnerable to the latter. Stern suggests that he could avoid the difficulty by sacrificing the notion of external reality in favour of internal standards of coherence, as in Laudan's post-Kuhnian philosophy of science (AM 151-3). In the absence of the thing in itself as an objective standard against which our perspectives might be judged, the concept of relativism ceases to have any application. MacIntyre, however, refuses to relinquish the conceptual relation between reason and objective truth (AM 297-8). But given the degree of pluralism allowed by his incommensurability thesis it is odd that he constantly dismisses as 'philosophical fictions' the core concepts of the various strands of modern philosophy - such things as rights, universal reason, moral sense theory, intuition and will to power - rather than enquiring whether they represent varyingly adequate attempts to grasp various aspects of human nature which are identified more accurately in his own scheme of things. As Hegel himself pointed out, philosophical propositions are easy enough to refute, but nothing is gained thereby unless the initial proposition, together with its refutation, is made the starting-point of a system.

> The refutation consists in pointing out its defect; and it is only defective because it is only the universal or principle, it is only the beginning. If the refutation is thorough it is derived and developed from the principle itself, not accompanied by counter-assertions and random thoughts from outside. The refutation would therefore properly consist in the further development of the principle and in thus remedying the defectiveness; if it did not mistakenly pay attention solely to its *negative* action, without awareness of its progress and result on their *positive* side too.[19]

The Hegelian dialectic, like MacIntyre's, can start anywhere, but unlike the latter it always leads in the end to Absolute Reason. This is because the contingent events of history are ultimately subordinate to the norms by which they are judged, which takes us to Janet Coleman's point about the ahistorical standards by which the ends of practices are defined. Focusing on MacIntyre's definition of excellence in terms of "the best standards realized so far," (AM 84 [AV 191-3]) she writes: "No definitions[20] change over time for Aristotle or Aquinas and this is what MacIntyre seems to have omitted in his discussion of practices, which, he says 'never have a goal or goals fixed for all time'." (AM 70 [AV 194]). By reducing such definitions to conventional codes of cultural self-expression he disables "the realist understanding of definition [which] is fundamental to Thomism." (AM 70-1) Furthermore, in

asserting that a means is internal to an end when the *end* cannot be adequately specified independently of the *means* (AM 81 [AV 184]), MacIntyre reverses the Aristotelian conception of a virtue, thus leaving the standards by which practices are judged and the definition of their ends to the mercy of the temporal and culturally-bound arena of custom and accident. "Particular cultures and traditions are not existents in their own right; they are, as Aquinas insisted, the effects of what exists in its own right, and as such they are determined by the choices of humans, choices for which they are responsible and which indeed may be vicious and incompatible with their definition." (AM 83) Nor is the danger averted by MacIntyre's account of justice, based as it is on the principle of proportional desert.

> The definition of a doctor is one who heals the ill no matter what status the patient has in society. The definition of a doctor does not include the privilege of judging relative merits of patients as political participants or in any other way other than in terms of their health. (AM 83)

The same point is made by Gordon Graham, who claims that participants in a tradition of enquiry and practice can only guard against distortion and error by referring to a set of theological or rational concepts that are unaffected by change.

> In order to tell the story of a tradition and understand one's place in it, we must have conditions of identity for the continuation of that tradition, both in the past and for the future. But these conditions of identity, though they will be informed by historical knowledge, cannot be determined by them. For precisely how we tell the normative story - as one of progress, decline, purification or deviation - will depend on what we identify as the tradition's normatively necessary elements. (AM 173)

If this is true, he argues, then MacIntyre would have to admit that history is finally subject to its philosophical interpretation, and this would bring him closer to Hegel (AM 173-4). As we have seen, MacIntyre avoids this by claiming that the existence of more than one rational scheme signifies a distinction between reality itself and the incommensurable truth-claims of rival traditions (WJ 169-70). But his scheme is secured to this tradition-independent reality by means of his principle of maximal dialectical vulnerability. "Thus, perfectly contingent starting points progressively but negatively struggle free of the historical chrysalis and float upwards to universality."[21] This means that narrative and tradition are ultimately overruled by the dialectic of question and answer, as it moves inexorably towards an 'idealistic' assimilation of the history of philosophy to a fully-fledged philosophy (or theology) of history. But a narrative does not necessarily describe a progressive trajectory, unless this is required by the internal logic of the plot as in Hegel's synthesis of freedom and necessity, and in order to maintain the disjunction between system and history that justifies his return to Thomism, MacIntyre has to resist this kind of Hegelian closure. His whole project depends on the possibility of separating the intentional ascent of dialectical progress from the accidental descent of the history of philosophy, thus enabling him to account for the lack of progress in philosophy as a whole. But his distinction between system and history is precisely the opening for relativism that

worries the critics cited above, so that the choice is not, as MacIntyre would have it, between Hegelianism and realism but between Hegelianism and relativism.

MacIntyre's account of the task of engaging with rival traditions invites a similar conclusion. The encounter with a rival scheme of belief and practice involves an exercise of philosophical imagination, and although genuine creativity is precluded by the fact that we cannot participate in an alien tradition as anything more than actors speaking lines, this does not mean that we cannot on occasion "by acts of empathetic, conceptual imagination" mimic its adherents well enough "to perceive and conceive the natural and social worlds as they perceive and conceive them." (WJ 395) This is reminiscent of Hume's description of the imagination as "the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy,"[22] except that while MacIntyre views imagination as a sort of penumbra around the field of intelligibility, Hume sees rationality itself as no more than a species of imagination. What this suggests is that a Humean morality secured in *Sittlichkeit* may be no more subjective and arbitrary than MacIntyre's culturally coded rationality. As MacIntyre admits himself: "One of the problems for any later philosopher is that of how it is possible not to be a Humean." (AM 299) According to Bradley, this is enough to undermine the rigid boundaries he erects between one tradition and another.

> Again, while heavily critical of the Humean account of sentiment and passion, his analysis of the socially-constituted self owes a great deal to it, with the result that the contemporary situation in respect of ethical disagreement is very different from the overt description he offers of it. We are not simply, as he would have it, the confused inheritors of various conflicting ethical traditions; rather, his ethical theory itself indicates that those different traditions can themselves be treated as the moments or elements within a historical movement - a logic of narrative history - that is the self-unfolding of a complex, unitary tradition, characterized (as he shows all living traditions are) by conflict, argument and change.[23]

It would be hard to miss the Hegelian implication. Indeed, given the moral and intellectual destitution of MacIntyre's rivals, it is questionable whether there is any such thing as an 'external' argument, for those who reject all traditions are called to conversion, while the rest of his opponents only need to be apprised of their lack of self-understanding. And given the scope of his ambition one might expect that MacIntyre's philosophy, like Hegel's, would incorporate its historical conditions - the false consciousness of his opponents - into its own substance, which is indeed what is finally achieved at the end of his critique of the encyclopaedist standpoint in *Three Rival Versions*. The Thomist is said to agree with the genealogist in seeing the moral rules of European modernity as relics of a forgotten past.

> But the Thomist . . . also discerns in the continuous reappropriation of the rules, and in the recurring resistance to discarding them, evidence of the work of *synderesis*, of that fundamental initial grasp of the primary precepts of the natural law, to which cultural degeneration can partially or temporarily blind us but which can never be obliterated. So the Thomist claims to be able to render intelligible the history of both modern morality and modern moral philosophy in a way which is not available to those who themselves inhabit the conceptual frameworks peculiar to modernity. (TRV 194)

What MacIntyre has provided are the resources to reconstitute modern philosophy on the basis of natural theology, apart from that element that collapses into its own postmodern critique. In other words, he is able to refute modern philosophy precisely insofar as he shares its fundamental premises, which remain invisible to most of its practitioners. By returning to Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas he is able to give full articulation to those background assumptions on which the whole project of western philosophy is predicated, even in the distorted versions and subversions of modernity and postmodernity. To replace its theistic foundations is to repair rather than refute modernity, so it would seem that we have only one tradition to deal with after all: the single, if complex history of European philosophy which includes all the disparate elements MacIntyre has managed to integrate and account for in his revision of their history. But is there not someone missing from MacIntyre's catalogue of readers? Has he not overlooked a fourth possibility, one that is implicit in his own argument? Since we all inhabit the kind of fragmented society in which all three modes of life intersect, it should be possible to find someone who is equally at home in two or even all three of them, someone standing in the same relationship to genealogy and tradition as Aquinas is said to have stood in relation to Aristotle and Augustine. In fact there are several candidates, but as we shall see, the forerunner of them all is Søren Kierkegaard, whom I regard as the first post-metaphysical theologian.

Although his history of philosophy is explicitly philosophical, MacIntyre's rejection of the Hegelian myth of evolution means that he can only explain the decline of Thomism as an accident. But in terms of his own account of that history, what we have to learn from the failure of Thomism is similar to the lesson that Aquinas himself derived from the collision of pagan philosophy with Christianity. Despite the fact that a knowledge of God and the precepts of natural law are supposed to be available from the outset of enquiry, there comes a point beyond which this knowledge cannot help us. "What one discovers in oneself and all other human beings is something surd and unaccountable in terms of the rational understanding of human nature: a rooted tendency to disobedience in the will and distraction by passion, which causes obscuring of the reason and on occasion systematic cultural deformation." (TRV 140) This does not mean that we were deluded in allowing our efforts to be directed by a belief in a final cause and end. "What the discovery of wilful evil disrupts, or apparently disrupts, is the intelligible scheme through which the individual is able to understand him or herself as both directed towards and explicable in terms of that end." (TRV 140) MacIntyre recognizes that, without the promise of immortality provided by the self-revelation of God, Aristotelian philosophy prefigures a Hobbesian reduction of good and evil to pleasure and pain. Similarly:

> the discovery of human inability and resourcelessness to live by the natural law and to achieve the excellences of the virtues, the discovery of sin, points forward to a kind of existential despair which was completely unknown in the ancient world, but which has been a recurrent malady of modernity. Yet for Aquinas, by contrast, it is the discovery of wilful evil which makes the achievement of the human end possible. How so? The

> acknowledgement by oneself of radical defect is a necessary condition for one's reception of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. (TRV 140)

At this stage in the history of moral enquiry everything that came before is suspended, and the rational framework of practical reason can only be recovered by starting again from the insight now granted by grace. This does not require one to know anything about Aristotle, and indeed the life of philosophical enquiry, the route to knowledge of the *causa sui*, is open only to those with sufficient wealth and leisure (in ancient times largely secured on the basis of slavery), which are no guarantee of the gift of faith. For MacIntyre, however, such considerations do not essentially alter the task of philosophy, and we are told that even when Aquinas had reached the conclusion of his argument, the methodology of the *Summa Theologiae*- the dialectic of question and answer - still left open the possibility of returning with new arguments.

> Except for the finality of Scripture and dogmatic tradition, there is and can be no finality. The narrative of enquiry always points beyond itself with directions drawn from the past, which, so that past itself teaches, will themselves be open to change. (TRV 125)

This seems to assume not only that the meaning of Scripture is fixed and unproblematic, but also that it is somehow set apart from the narrative of moral and philosophical enquiry, which goes about its business as usual. But once it has found its way to Christianity, what is there left for philosophy to do? If anything meets the criteria by which, according to MacIntyre, an enquiry can be recognized as substantially complete (WJ 80), then surely it is the light shed by the 'finality' of revelation on the Aristotelian account of the virtues. Thomism is not just incidentally a Christian mode of discourse as well as a tradition or a dialectical construction. The decisive difference between MacIntyre's version of Thomism and that defended by Coleman is that, for the latter, the standards by which our practices and enquiries are judged are not set by historically-situated human beings, but by God. All chains of reasoning and moral enquiry must eventually terminate in some set of first principles which can only be justified in the first instance by appeal to the self-evidence of *synderesis*. However:

> Since what is proposed to us from God is *not* self-evident, exceeding as it does the capacity of the human intellect, Aquinas says that it should be proposed to man by someone to whom it *is* self-evident and this is Christ, not some other authoritative teacher within a community of human practitioners. Christ then makes it known to all in a way that is similar to the way we know things with certainty by resolving them into indemonstrable first principles. (AM 85)[24]

By the logic of MacIntyre's account of the progress of rational enquiry, the truths of faith revealed by Christ, the Word of God, should now supply those first principles which are the *archê-telos* of both theoretical and practical reason. But MacIntyre explicitly rules this out by claiming that "the part of Christian theology which concerns man's true end and which is not Aristotelian metaphysics is on Aquinas' own account a matter of faith, not of reason." (AV 179) For Coleman, however, to sever the link between reason and faith is to distort Thomism

beyond repair. Reminding us that Aquinas saw grace as the perfection rather than the destruction of nature, she points out that human judgement is constituted by the same reality that comes to full expression in the truths of revelation.

> Human cognition and action simply are already in the real and Aquinas' insistence on this metaphysics was . . . shared by virtually all contemporaries and perhaps still is shared, although not explicitly, by all philosophical enquiry that is not limited by the narrowness of the self-imposed parameters of language theory. For Aquinas there *is* a fullness of knowledge that takes place in faith but man, *naturally*, has a foretaste of this kind of knowledge. (AM 85)

Perhaps it is the perceived disjunction between faith and reason that leads MacIntyre to define 'tradition' in terms of philosophy rather than theology, and to focus on natural rather than revealed theology. It certainly explains his comments about Meister Eckhart, and his view that rhetorical expressions of faith are inevitably irrational. If he wanted to establish a concept and narrative of tradition that would be clearly distinguishable from a history of western philosophy in which both Hegel and Nietzsche can be legitimately counted among the successors of Plato and Aristotle, it would have to be framed in terms of such things as the so-called 'scandal of particularity' (Kierkegaard calls it the 'paradox'), the logic of election and the events of salvation history, as well as of the pilgrimage of Israel and the Church before, during and after the epoch of Christendom. This would expose the incommensurability between sacred and secular reason, one founded on the love of God, the other on love of self.

The mediaeval Church was well aware of the fallibility of tradition, as an added complication to the primary problem of deriving a synchronic set of principles from the historical event of the Incarnation. As George Steiner observes:

> There is a strict, utterly mysterious temporality in the coming and ministry of Christ. Being so naturally, if inexplicably, immersed in actual time, the meanings of that coming, the normative consequences of the sayings of Christ and of the writings of the Apostles, must, as it were, be stabilized in eternity. . . . To achieve finalities of meaning one . . . must arrest the cancerous throng of interpretations and re-interpretations. The explicative and legislative decrees promulgated by Rome and by the custodians of orthodoxy in mediaeval Paris, the doctrinal-metaphysical enclosedness of Aquinas's *Summa*, can be understood as a series of attempts at hermeneutic 'end-stopping'. . . . In scholastic faith, logic and grammatology (as, later, in Hegel), eternity is ordinance and closed form. Unendingness is Satanic chaos. . . . The Roman Catholic warning that interpretation without end, even where it claims to be 'fundamentalist' and textually reductive, will modulate, first, into historical criticism, next into more or less metaphoric deism and, lastly, into agnosticism, is logically and historically valid.[25]

Despite his insistence on the necessary inconclusiveness of the Thomistic mode of enquiry, MacIntyre's attempt to put a stop to the interminable disagreements to which he attributes the paralysis of contemporary moral debate is driven by the same desire for closure and totality. But as a first step towards the accomplishment of that project he calls for these disagreements to be built into the structure of a reformed academic establishment. The problem with this is the need for a non-partisan bureaucratic framework to ensure fair-play (TRV 231), which

reproduces the liberal aspiration to provide a neutral setting for the pursuit of diverse conceptions of the good life. And given the obvious absurdity of trying to institutionalize the genealogical mode of enquiry, this would hand the victory to the encyclopaedist standpoint. But since MacIntyre has already shown that liberalism can offer no resistance to full-blown relativism, the institutionalization of these disputes, together with the indefinite deferral of a Thomist solution, represents a victory for those who uphold an ontology of radical difference and conflict. We are almost back with the stalemate with which his project began, except that now the battle-lines have been made clear. MacIntyre, of course, wants to claim a good deal more than this for his own tradition, but until the conflict is decided we are faced with two alternative outcomes: the eventual reduction of all three positions to whichever one emerges triumphant, or never-ending deadlock and undecidability.

Insofar as the traditions in question can be clearly differentiated they are each constituted by mutual opposition and defined by what they exclude. If its boundaries were erased by the inclusion of its rivals MacIntyre's position would lose its specificity, and although his argument moves towards the resolution of differences, to the extent that it is structured by conflict and the indefinite deferral of closure, this would mean the abolition of his own philosophy. Perhaps what underlies the conclusion of *Three Rival Versions* is the recognition that the elimination of the other spells suicide. It could thus be read as a belated attempt to shore up his system against ruin. As Derrida writes (commenting on the Catholic political philosophy of Carl Schmitt):

> This reactive and unscrupulous dread is often presented in the rigour of the concept, a vigilant, meticulous, implacable rigour inherited from the tradition - from a tradition, moreover, that this entire discourse intends to serve and repeat, in order to put it up against the novelty of what is coming and to see . . . that it carries the day. With the energy of a last-ditch effort. If one is not to lose the enemy, one must know who he is, and what, in the past, the word 'enemy' always designated - more precisely . . . what it *should* have designated.[26]

In order not to be a Hegelian, MacIntyre has to admit an indefinite degree of deferral, thus installing difference at the base of a system that would otherwise swallow itself along with its rivals. If Thomism wins the day, what was originally just one element within that system now takes up the whole into itself. But the same applies if the only alternative is an ontology of conflict. What started as a supplement to MacIntyre's discourse - a temporary arrangement designed to bring some order into the arbitrariness of contemporary debate - now becomes its fundamental condition.

It has to be said that MacIntyre's discovery of the 'hidden cataclysm' at the origin of modern philosophy is far less controversial than the rhetoric of the opening chapter of *After Virtue* implies. In fact, his version of events has been substantially corroborated by almost every significant critique of modernity to have appeared since Hegel.

> Critiques of this Cartesian-Kantian representational model of knowledge are now so much a part of accepted philosophical wisdom that they can be said to constitute a separate and

> clearly identifiable genre in Anglo-American philosophy. The leading practitioners are commonly thought to be Richard Rorty, Alasdair MacIntyre, Ian Hacking and Charles Taylor.[27]

If have no quarrel with MacIntyre's critique of modernity, however, it is not because he has succeeded in returning the residue of traditional morality to its classical foundations, but because, in so doing, he has demonstrated the continuity between classical and modern philosophy, neither of which, in my view, are suitable for the transmission of what Kierkegaard calls the 'existential communication' of Christianity. It should be fairly clear by now that, with Milbank, "in contrast to most critiques of MacIntyre, I do not find him *sufficiently* relativistic or historicist."

> There is for me no method, no mode of argument that charts us smoothly past the Scylla of foundationalism and the Charybdis of difference. Nor do I find it possible to defend the notion of 'traditioned reason' in general, outside my attachment to a tradition which grounds this idea in the belief in the historical guidance of the Holy Spirit.[28]

This raises the possibility that the Nietzschean mode of enquiry may be at least as suitable as MacIntyre's for the discussion of morality, whether inside or outside Christianity. At the end of his exposure of the incoherence of the encyclopaedist standpoint MacIntyre asks: "What, then, is at stake in this conflict between those who have learned from Nietzsche and those who have learned from Aquinas?" (TRV 195) To this question we now turn.

Notes

1 "How is Intellectual Excellence in Philosophy to be Understood by a Catholic Philosopher? What has Philosophy to Contribute to Catholic Intellectual Excellence?" in *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*, vol. 12, no. 1, Summer 1991, p. 50.

2 *Essais heretiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, trans. Erika Abrams (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1981: limited Czech edition, Prague: Perlice, 1975)

3 "Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel's* Interview with Martin Heidegger," trans. Maria Alter and John D. Caputo, *Philosophy Today*, 20 (1976), pp. 277-8. Quoted by Caputo in *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, p. 248.

4 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 241.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, p. 255. Elsewhere Caputo questions how far MacIntyre's prescription is "from retreating from the public in order to nourish one's virtue in private, and how far is that from what he calls emotivism raised to the level of small communities?" *Ibid.*, p. 243.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 254.

9 See Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, pp. 432-5.

10 James Bradley, "Alasdair MacIntyre on the Good Life and the 'Narrative Model'," in the *Heythrop Journal*, XXXI, (1990), p. 326.

11 See also *Whose Justice? Which Morality?* p. 365, "Incommensurability, Truth and the Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues," in *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives*, ed. Eliot Deutsch, p. 111, and "Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble? The Relevance of System and History," in *Philosophical Imagination and Cultural Memory: Appropriating Historical Traditions*, ed. Patricia Cook, p. 79.

12 John Milbank points out that there is no such thing as pure pragmatism. Everything depends on the context of belief and practice within which a course of action is conceived, so that building a cathedral can be just as

pragmatic as building a nuclear power station. See *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, p. 342.

13 Jean-Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians," in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward, pp. 279-80.

14 Marion, *ibid.*, p. 283. See also Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, p. 62.

15 MacIntyre, "Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?" *ibid.*, p. 79.

16 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 346.

17 Milbank, *ibid.*, p. 330.

18 Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p. 37.

19 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 13.

20 A definition is defined as "a set of words [*logos*] which indicates the essence [of a subject]". (AM 70) For Aquinas and Aristotle a subject is defined once it has been assigned to a genus, which is unchangeable and universal, and differentiated from the other members of that genus.

21 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 328.

22 David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and the Principles of Morals*, p. 255.

23 James Bradley, "Notes and Comments: Alasdair MacIntyre on the Good Life and the "Narrative Model"." in the *Heythrop Journal*, XXXI, 1990, p. 326.

24 See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV, c.54.

25 George Steiner, *Real Presences*, pp. 44-5.

26 Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p. 88.

27 Kenneth Surin, *The Turnings of Darkness and Light: Essays in Philosophical and Systematic Theology*, p. 247.

28 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 327-8.

2. THE ABSOLUTE PARADOX

2. 1 The Form of the Question

The answer to the question posed at the end of Chapter 1 is that what is at stake "in this conflict between those who have learned from Nietzsche and those who have learned from Aquinas" is precisely the status of the question of essence - 'what is?' - which predetermines the enquiry as ontology, the enquiry into objects in themselves. As Levinas points out: "The 'what?' is already wholly enveloped within being." (OB 23)

> The answer required is from the start in terms of being, whether one understands by it *entity* or *being of entities*, entity or being's *essence*. The question "what?" is the correlative of what it wishes to discover, and already has recourse to it. . . . It is ontology, and at the same time has a part in the effectuation of the very being it seeks to understand. (OB 23-4)

Since all lines of ontic research go back to ontology, to the understanding of essence, "[b]eing would be not only what is most problematical; it would be what is most intelligible." (OB 24) For Nietzsche, however, the notion "[t]hat things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from interpretation and subjectivity is a quite idle hypothesis: it presupposes that interpreting and being-subjective are not essential, that a thing freed from all relationships would still be a thing." (WP 560: 303) According to Gilles Deleuze, who has learned enough from Nietzsche for MacIntyre to use him as an interpreter (TRV 38, 207-8), the opening question of the Platonic-Socratic dialectic signifies a way of thinking which distinguishes abstract essences, such as beauty, justice and truth, from the accidental instances of their embodiment. Thus "the opposition of essence and appearance, of being and becoming, depends primarily on a mode of questioning, a form of question." (NP 76) For Nietzsche, the guiding question of the will to truth is always a confused and distorted way of asking 'which one?' "At the bottom of it there always lies 'what is that for *me*?' (for us, for all that lives etc.)" (WP 556: 301)

Nietzsche's answer to the question 'what is being?' is that being is becoming. This has the effect of converting all further questions of essence into the currency of the genealogical mode of enquiry (in which MacIntyre himself is speculating when he asks questions like *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*). For becoming is will to power, and the will to power is a perspectival multiplicity of forces whose differential principle is the faculty of evaluation. "This is the crucial point; *high* and *low, noble* and *base*, are not values but represent the differential element from which the value of values themselves derives." (NP 2) An evaluation is always the expression of a mode of existence, and there are values which can only be generated or believed on the basis of a 'base' or 'noble' way of living and thinking. So the question 'what is?' must be dramatized by asking who wants to know and how they propose to find out. On this view, MacIntyre is right to open the argument by asking "Who in the debates between . . . the

adherents of post-Nietzschean genealogy and those who give their allegiance to the traditions unified by Aquinas speaks to whom? And how?" (TRV 196) It was in order to address questions such as these that Nietzsche developed his threefold methodology:

> A *symptomology*, since it interprets phenomena, treating them as symptoms whose sense must be sought in the forces that produce them. A *typology*, since it interprets forces from the standpoint of their quality, be it active or reactive. A *genealogy*, since it evaluates the origin of forces from the point of view of their nobility or baseness, since it discovers their ancestry in the will to power. (NP 75)

Nietzsche redefines the concept of essence in terms of the forces with which a phenomenon interacts, those which it commands and that which it obeys. "Even God and the universe are caught in a relation of domination, however debatable the interpretation of such a relation may be in this case." (NP 51) Whereas the dialectic of the will to truth is guided by the principle of falsifiability, or maximal dialectical vulnerability,[1] Nietzsche evaluates forces in terms of their capacity to affect and be affected by others (NP 62). Indeed, as the source of the value of value itself, the will to power could almost be mistaken for divine charity.

> *In this way the will to power is essentially creative and giving*: it does not aspire . . . above all it does not desire power. It *gives* . . . power is in the will as the "bestowing virtue", through power the will itself bestows sense and value. (NP 85)

Nor does it will to engage in conflict. "One cannot over emphasise *the extent to which the notions of struggle, war, rivalry or even comparison are foreign to Nietzsche and to his conception of the will to power.*" (NP 82) Hence his objections to Darwin, who confused survival with selection. "He failed to see that the result of struggle was the opposite of what he thought; that it does select, but it selects only the weak and assures their triumph." (NP 82)[2]

The difference between noble and base, or active and reactive forces is an originary hierarchy, the identity of origin and difference (NP 8). The trouble only starts when the reactive forces become discontented with their lot and refuse to allow themselves to be 'acted' by the higher. Here we can see how Nietzsche's constant practice of inverting everything fits MacIntyre's description of his philosophy as an "inverted mirror image" of Enlightenment philosophy (WJ 253).[3]

> The active type not only designates active forces but a hierarchical whole in which active forces prevail over the reactive forces and where reactive forces are acted; conversely the reactive type designates a whole in which reactive forces triumph and separate active forces from what they can do. (NP 86)

Having conceived ideas above their station, the reactive forces flock together in order to separate the active forces from what they can do, which is how we arrive at the notion of causality, the separation of cause and effect. Separated from what they can do, the active forces in turn become reactive, and so we have the onset of nihilism. There seems to be no escape from this process; nihilism is "the motor of universal history, the famous 'historical

meaning' or 'meaning of history' which at one time found its most adequate manifestation in Christianity," (NP 34) while *ressentiment*, 'bad conscience' and nihilism seem almost to be constitutive of humanity itself (NP 64). It would seem that Nietzsche accepts at face-value Hegel's assimilation of Christianity to speculative philosophy - "modern dialectic is the truly Christian ideology" (NP 18) - so that the central symbol of Christianity functions as the organizing principle of the Platonic-Hegelian dialectic, and "that ghastly paradox of a 'God on the cross'" becomes "the image of contradiction and its solution, life submits to the labour of the negative." (NP 15-16) But can the ultimately self-destructive activity of the will to truth be legitimately ascribed to Christianity, or does it not have more affinity with the forces which have always tried to separate Christ from what He can do?

The conflict between these two hierarchies, active and reactive, should not be confused with the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave, which is only how things appear in the reactive perspective. From the higher standpoint, the relation between two forces is never one of simple opposition or negation; the superior force does not deny the other but affirms its own difference. "For the speculative element of negation, opposition or contradiction Nietzsche substitutes the practical element of *difference*, the object of affirmation and enjoyment." (NP 9) Existence is innocent; it is only our grotesque representations that would have it otherwise, therefore "[w]e must find, for each thing in turn, the special means by which it is affirmed, by which it ceases to be negative." (NP 17) To the dialectical and Christian denial of life Nietzsche opposes a 'Dionysian' logic of unconditional affirmation, the tragic task of multiple affirmation which affirms even the bitterest suffering. When MacIntyre asks 'who speaks to whom?' the question is designed to lead to an exposure of the aporetic character of the postmodern self, the author of the genealogical text. But despite the supposed insubstantiality of that self - which in any case represents a legitimate dissolution of the Platonic-Cartesian subject - inasmuch as it takes its bearings from Nietzsche the postmodern project is one of stoical self-mastery, raising the art of self-discipline to a higher power.

The question of 'who is speaking to whom?' leads to an enquiry into the nature of the force expressed in the speaker's evaluations: "What does *the one that* says this, that thinks or feels that, will?" (NP 78) This mode of enquiry involves the exploration of a multiplicity of existential possibilities, which, as we shall see, is also the purpose of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship. What a will wants determines its type - active or reactive, noble or base - so that the question of who speaks to whom can be decided by asking which standpoint wills to affirm its difference and which one wants to deny what differs from it.

> What does this will that wills the dialectic want? It is an exhausted force which does not have the strength to affirm its difference, a force that no longer acts but rather reacts to the forces that dominate it - only such a force brings to the foreground the negative element in its relation to the other. Such a force denies all that it is not and makes this negation its own essence and the principle of its existence. (NP 9)

In a world which is not only perspectival but radically deceptive, the proper categories of thought are not truth and falsity but sense and value. The concept of truth is in itself entirely undetermined; it receives its content only from the sense and value of the force that takes possession of thought (NP 104). The will to truth is essentially moral, in the sense that it is based on the fear of being deceived which is the origin of the value of honesty.

> But he who wills the truth always wants to depreciate this high power of the false: he makes life an 'error' and this world an 'appearance'. He therefore opposes knowledge to life and to the world he opposes another world, a world-beyond, the truthful world. (NP 96)

The will to truth wants to exchange this world for another, better one. In essence, therefore, it is a will to nothingness, and yet it seeks its own preservation. "The one who repudiates life is also the one who wants a diminished life, the conservation of *his* type and moreover its power and triumph, the triumph and contagion of reactive forces." (NP 96) Thus the moral law establishes what Milbank calls "the kingdom of weakness which is death and dying, and precisely the best thing for the weak (as Nietzsche rightly says) is that they should die as soon as possible.[4] Given the fact of death, all that a secular morality can do is to put it off for a while, as in modern medicine and its logical extension, the technology of cryogenic suspension. But in seeking to preserve life at all costs "virtue postpones this only possible cure for death, death itself. Here, in hastened death lies for us the only absolute good, a kind of negative image of paradisal goodness in the fallen world."[5]

For Nietzsche, just as much as for MacIntyre, what is ultimately at stake comes down to the question of "[w]hat is justice?" (NP 18). Here again everything depends on the attitude of the questioner (whose justice?). MacIntyre's emphasis on rational accountability indicates that the fundamental categories of his thinking are *ressentiment* (it's your fault) and bad conscience (it's my fault) (NP 21). As we have seen, his Aristotelian ethic is an economy of proportional desert, in which rewards and punishments are determined by a hierarchy of for-the-sake-of relationships whose apex or *archê-telos* is the final cause of every subordinate good that can be specified in the major premise of a practical syllogism. It is thus a meritocracy, grounded in an ontology in which goodness and truth are taken to be predicates of being, and reflected in a consciousness which is itself a modality of being. According to Levinas, however:

> Arising at the apex of essence, goodness is *other* than being. It no longer keeps accounts . . . It destroys without leaving souvenirs . . . The exceptional, extra-ordinary, transcendent character of goodness is due to just this break with being and history. To reduce the good to being, to its calculations and its history, is to nullify goodness. The ever possible sliding between subjectivity and being, of which subjectivity would be but a mode, the equivalence of the two languages, stops here. Goodness gives to subjectivity its irreducible signification. (OB 18)

I will discuss this alternative in Chapter 3, in connection with the ethico-religious critique of classical ontology which, as far as I know, makes its first appearance in the work of Kierkegaard.

Nietzsche's way of access to the good is the doctrine of eternal recurrence. Far from being, as MacIntyre suggests, an optional extra "which he may later have rejected," (TRV 48) this is the highpoint of his meditation, the ultimate affirmation of affirmation. "Why should affirmation be better than negation? . . . the solution can only be given by the test of the eternal return: what is better and better absolutely is that which returns, that which can bear returning, that which wills its return." (NP 86) As the being of becoming and the unity of multiplicity, the eternal return is the closest thing in Nietzsche's metaphysics to a transcendental principle. It is a double affirmation which affirms even the negative, for just as Christian morality is the ruin of Christianity,[6] when the forces of nihilism have finally exhausted everything else they can only turn upon themselves, so that negation negates itself. "The eternal return transmutes the negative: it turns the heavy into something light, it makes the negative cross over into affirmation, it makes negation a power of affirming." (NP 86) Above all, as an ethical imperative - "*whatever you will, will it in such a way that you will its eternal return*" (NP 68) - the eternal return becomes a rigorous principle of selection, the criterion for Nietzsche's equivalent to a new heaven and earth in which all imperfection is abolished.

As Kierkegaard recognized well in advance of Nietzsche, the worst possible response to this kind of critique would be to embark on a rational defence of Christianity, even one based, like MacIntyre's, on Aquinas' *Quinque Viae* (TRV 123).

> So rather let us mock God, out and out, as has been done before in the world . . . For to prove the existence of one who is present is the most shameless affront, since it is an attempt to make him ridiculous; but unfortunately people have no inkling of this . . . and regard it as a pious undertaking. But how could it occur to anybody to prove that he exists, unless one had permitted oneself to ignore him, and now makes the thing all the worse by proving his existence before his very nose? (CUP 485)

Further: "Suppose Christianity never intended to be understood; suppose that, in order to express this, and to prevent anyone from misguidedly entering upon the objective way, it has declared itself to be the paradox . . . Suppose it refuses to be understood, and that the maximum of understanding which could come in question is to understand that it cannot be understood." (CUP 192) For Kierkegaard, Christianity has nothing to do with objective knowledge, but this does not make it irrational, nor does it rule out the possibility of understanding something about what Christianity is not. Rather it is a question of 'which rationality?'

In the rest of this chapter I will try to prepare the way for a reappraisal of the positions represented by MacIntyre and Nietzsche in the light of the structures of human existence analysed by Kierkegaard. As Terry Eagleton observes, "[i]t is surprising in a sense that Kierkegaard - ironist, jester, apostle of the aporetic and enemy of all totality - has not received

more attention in a deconstructive age."[7] One explanation for this neglect is that most of Kierkegaard's philosophical successors have used his insights in order to defend the very positions he condemned. In order to do so they have had to ignore his uncompromising commitment to Christianity, albeit a Christianity which MacIntyre would presumably regard as the most extreme form of Protestant individualism. But however great their differences (and, as I will show, they are less pronounced than MacIntyre would have us believe), at least MacIntyre and Kierkegaard profess a common allegiance to Christianity, and since the pseudonymous part of Kierkegaard's authorship purposely falls short of Christianity, viewing it from a variety of aesthetic perspectives which prefigures the postmodern proclivity for masks, it is worth investigating whether these works can help resolve the conflict between MacIntyre and his postmodern opponents. And since, as I hope to show, if one subtracts from Kierkegaard's philosophy its overt dogmatic content one ends up with Heidegger, up to a point it will be possible to supplement his account with material drawn from the latter. In what follows I will respect Kierkegaard's wish that, "if it might occur to anyone to quote a particular saying from the books, he would do me the favour to cite the name of the respective pseudonymous author" (CUP 552) Most of the topics touched upon here will be expanded in later chapters.

2. 2 The Stages of Existence

In Chapter 1 it was suggested that what MacIntyre calls the 'traditional mode of enquiry' was brought to a conclusion by Hegel. Here I will argue that the 'existential thinking' introduced by Kierkegaard as an antidote to 'the System' renders MacIntyre's classical revival redundant. My central claim is this: while Kierkegaard is sufficiently at home in the post-metaphysical idiom of Nietzsche and his followers to be able to account for their positions in their own terms as well as in those of Christian dogmatics, neither of these strategies is available within the Platonic framework of MacIntyre's scheme. For example: modernity can be described as the epoch in which the dimensions of experience and enquiry formerly signified by the interchangeable names of God - Goodness, Beauty and Truth - are allowed to disintegrate and float free as autonomous fields of discourse. While MacIntyre wants to subdue the passions and reclaim morality for reason, but is content to leave rhetoric and poetry to the enemy, Nietzsche's elevation of art over truth paves the way for a wholesale aestheticization of both morality and cognition. As Johannes Climacus remarks, "[i]f thought speaks deprecatingly of the imagination, imagination in its turn speaks deprecatingly of thought; and likewise with feeling." (CUP 311) The task, however, "is not to exalt the one at the expense of the other, but to give them an equal status, to unify them in simultaneity; the medium in which they are unified is *existence*." (CUP 311) Poetry is not a juvenile phase to be

transcended by reason, as Hegel claimed of both art and religion, but the highest expression of the possibilities of language, which it is the duty and privilege of reason to preserve and enhance. "The true is not higher than the good and the beautiful, but the true and the good and the beautiful belong essentially to every human existence, and are unified for an existing individual not in thought but in existence." (CUP 311)

From Plato to Hegel, philosophy organizes these aspects of existence within its own knowledge of them, privileging epistemology and ontology over aesthetics and ethics in "an abstraction which annuls existence, a taking of the objects of knowledge out of existence." (CUP 311) As is well known, Kierkegaard identifies three stages of life, or spheres of existential possibility, in each of which a different aspect of the self is dominant, the somatic, the psychic, or the pneumatic:

> There are three existence-spheres: the esthetic, the ethical, the religious. . . . The ethical sphere is only a transition sphere, and therefore its highest expression is repentance as a negative action. The esthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious the sphere of fulfilment . . . (SLW 476)

As in the Hegelian dialectic, the lower spheres are not discarded but incorporated into the ones above, where they receive their rightful due. But neither epistemology nor ontology, still less any fantastic fusion of them both, is an existence-spheres in its own right.

> The metaphysical is abstraction, and there is no human being who exists metaphysically. The metaphysical, the ontological, is [*er*], but it does not exist [*er ikke til*], for when it exists it does so in the esthetic, in the ethical, in the religious, and when it is, it is the abstraction from or a *prius* [something prior] to the esthetic, the ethical the religious. (SLW 476)

As an existential option which exalts one human faculty at the expense of the others, a life devoted to the practice of intellectual speculation is an aesthetic mode of existence, which Kierkegaard often refers to as the 'aesthetic-metaphysical'. As the enquiry into being, metaphysics must by definition regard ethics as a branch of ontology - this is the basis of MacIntyre's equation of fact and value. For Kierkegaard, however, whenever philosophy claims jurisdiction over ethics it becomes subject to an ethical critique, a critique which both refers forward to Levinas' attempt to establish ethics as 'first philosophy' and back to Plato's Good beyond Being.

The spheres of existence are linked by the 'boundary zones' of irony and humour: "irony, constituting the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical; humor, as the boundary that separates the ethical from the religious." (CUP 448) The comical vision always denotes a backward glance over an existence-sphere which has been left behind. Comedy and pathos are two sides of the same coin, i.e., the ever-present contradiction (between intention and outcome etc.) that Kierkegaard views as constitutive of human existence.

> The tragic and the comic are the same, in so far as both are based on contradiction; but *the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical, the painless contradiction.* . . . The

> difference . . . lies in the relationship between the contradiction and the controlling idea. The comic apprehension evokes the contradiction or makes it manifest by having in mind the way out, which is why the contradiction is painless. The tragic apprehension sees the contradiction and despairs of the way out. (CUP 459-62)

In this context, both comedy and tragedy depend on the disjunction between the absolute significance of life as a whole and the relative goals posited within whichever sphere one happens to inhabit, or between one's involvement in that sphere and the ability to step back and view it from a higher perspective.

> What lies at the root of both the comic and the tragic . . . is the discrepancy, the contradiction, between the infinite and the finite, the eternal and that which becomes. . . . When the subjective existing thinker turns his face toward the Idea, his apprehension of the discrepancy is pathetic; when he turns his back on the Idea and lets this throw light from behind over the same discrepancy, the apprehension is in terms of the comic. (CUP 82-3)

The pathetic individual is aware of the contradiction, but despairs of finding a way out. Irony and humour, on the other hand, both presuppose a degree of abstraction, an absence of concern, and are only justified insofar as each has the contradiction within itself. Thus irony is justified over against immediate consciousness, which is outside the contradiction, but not against the ethical, while the religious sphere is impervious to comic apprehension. "The sphere of contradiction which humor dominates, including as it does the highest range of the comical, is something that such religiosity has itself brought to consciousness, and it has it within itself as something lower." (CUP 465) For Climacus, himself as a humourist, the personification of irony is Socrates. Humour is more compassionate than irony, which can easily become demonic if it does not turn toward the source of the illumination from which it derives its ability to puncture illusions. As Evans remarks:

> The individual who lacks the positive relation to the eternal but nevertheless turns against the relative values of life is described as in despair, and his activity leads to nihilism. It is ironical that much of what is described as existentialism fits this category and certainly would have been so regarded by Climacus.[8]

Although, as we shall see, Kierkegaard has no more time for world-historical speculation than he has for systematic philosophy, his account of the stages of existence is inseparable from his interpretation of history. Contrasting the aesthetic innocence of Greek culture with the ethical consciousness of Judaism, Vigilius Haufniensis informs us that "[w]hat has been indicated briefly here about the relation of the world-historical is repeated within Christianity in the individualities." (CA 104) One does not have to subscribe to Nietzsche's views about Plato having gone to school among the Jews (TI 114)[9] to notice the correspondence between Kierkegaard's existential dialectic and Patočka's analysis of the stages of history, from which Derrida extracts a history of the relationship between responsibility and the incalculable.

> Responsibility and faith go together, however paradoxical that may seem to some, and both should, in the same movement, exceed mastery and knowledge. . . . The paradox here plays on *two heterogeneous types of secret*: on the one hand the secret of historicity, what historical man has difficulty acknowledging but which he *must* acknowledge because it concerns his very responsibility; and on the other hand the secret of orgiastic mystery that the history of responsibility has to break with. (GD 6)

Like Kierkegaard, Patočka departs from the Hegelian dialectic in allocating the highest stage to Christianity rather than Reason, thus postponing the event of closure until the end of time. Reason is not assigned to a sphere of its own but displaced within the system from one place to another. Again, the lower spheres are incorporated in the higher, a movement which simultaneously sacrifices and conserves. "In the double conversion that he analyzes (that which turns away from orgiastic mystery towards Platonic or Neoplatonic mystery, as well as that which converts the latter into the Christian *mysterium tremendum*), it is true that the earlier mystery is 'subordinated' (*podrazeno*) by that which follows, but it is never eliminated." (GD 8-9) Although Platonism represents "a first awakening of responsibility by means of the soul's relation to the Good, this coming-to-conscience still retains its mystical element . . . this time unacknowledged, undeclared, denied." (GD 8) The second conversion is the passage from exteriority to interiority which Kierkegaard describes as the process of becoming subjective or becoming a self.

> This becoming responsible, that is, this becoming-historical, seems to be intimately tied to the properly Christian event of another secret, or more precisely of a mystery the *mysterium tremendum*: the terrifying mystery, the dread, fear and trembling of the Christian in the experience of the sacrificial gift. This trembling seizes one at the moment of becoming a person, and the person can become what it is only in being paralyzed . . . in its very singularity, by the gaze of God. Then it sees itself seen by the gaze of another, "a supreme, absolute and inaccessible being who holds us in his hand not by exterior but interior force." (116) (GD 6)

Patočka views what Heidegger calls the *Gestell*, or technological enframing of modernity, as a demonic return of the orgiastic-aesthetic. "Technological civilization only produces a heightening or recrudescence of the orgiastic, with the familiar effects of aestheticism and individualism that attend it, to the extent that it also produces boredom, for it 'levels' or neutralizes the mysterious or irreplaceable uniqueness of the responsible self." (GD 36)

What MacIntyre calls the incommensurability between classical thought and genealogy (TRV 209) can be attributed to the fact that Nietzsche's scale of values is shaped by aesthetic priorities rather than ethico-religious ones. As Climacus warns us: "Here as everywhere the different spheres must be kept clearly distinct, and the qualitative dialectic, with its decisive mutation that changes everything so that what was highest in one sphere is rendered in another sphere absolutely inadmissible, must be respected." (CUP 347) At first sight, the sequence of this dialectic seems to correspond more closely to MacIntyre's account of moral apprenticeship than to Nietzsche's venture beyond good and evil, which overleaps the ethical

and never arrives at the religious: "[a]s for the religious, it is an essential requirement that it should have passed through the ethical." (CUP 347) However, there is no room in MacIntyre's scheme for anything like the 'teleological suspension of the ethical' exemplified in *Fear and Trembling* by the story of the sacrifice which earned Abraham the title of the father of faith. "The ethical expression for what Abraham did is that he was willing to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he was willing to sacrifice Isaac; but in this contradiction lies the very anguish that can indeed make one sleepless, and yet without that anguish, Abraham is not the one he is." (FT 60) If the category of the religious trial cannot come to light in MacIntyre's philosophy it is because his proposal for a return to antique virtue completely overlooks the distinction between the hypothetical imperative of classical ethics and the categorical imperative of divine commandment.

> In part this is a pagan view, which is satisfied with a merely human criterion and simply does not know what sin is, that all sin is before God. No, *the opposite of sin is faith*, as it says in Romans 14: 23: "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." This is one of the most decisive definitions for all Christianity - that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith. (SD 82)

For Kierkegaard, as for Aquinas, classical ethics comes to grief on the revelation of sin and the corruption of the will, which is where Christianity begins. MacIntyre acknowledges this himself, but fails to recognize that it puts the whole question of morality on a different footing. The climax of the ethical stage of existence is the moment of repentance, a radical self-renunciation which creates "a boundless space, and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful." (SLW 477) The ethical is only a transition sphere, coterminous with the Stoic illusion of self-sufficiency and the unconscious hubris of pagan philosophy, a hubris for which there is no excuse after the reception of Christianity. From the standpoint of Christianity (which, alas, is not that of Christendom) the classical virtues amount to no more than

> the familiar kind of sin: the glittering vices,[10] the self-wilfulness that either in spiritlessness or with effrontery goes on being or wants to be ignorant of the human self's far, far deeper obligation in obedience to God with regard to its every clandestine desire and thought, with regard to its readiness to hear and understand and its willingness to follow every least hint from God as to his will for this self.(SD 82)

The claim that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith is always prone to give offence, which itself becomes the quintessential form of sin once the communication has been received. For to posit God in person as the goal and criterion of human life (rather than man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos*, or some chimerical *Ubermensch*) is simply too extravagant, "because it wants to make man into something so extraordinary that he cannot grasp the thought." (SD 83) In relation to the Aristotelian code of the mean between excess and deficiency (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1108 c-1109 c) Christianity is infinitely more transgressive than Nietzsche's titanism:

> The *summa summarum* [sum total] of all human wisdom is this "golden" (perhaps it is more correct to say "plated") mean: *ne quid nimis* [nothing too much]. Too little and too much spoil everything. . . . Now and then there is a genius who goes a little way beyond this, and he is called crazy - by sensible people. But Christianity makes an enormous giant stride beyond this *ne quid nimis* into the absurd, that is where Christianity begins - and offense. (SD 86-7)

It would not be difficult to mount a critique of MacIntyre on the basis of the Barthian view that sin is something which cannot be adequately characterized outside the context of Christian belief. In reply he might claim to be a moral philosopher, not a theologian.[11] But insofar as he describes himself as a follower of Aquinas and Augustine, I would argue that he *is* a theologian, or should be. For, as he says himself, every account of morality presupposes a sociology (AV 23), and in a reversal of the philosophical practice of demythologization, Milbank has shown that all sociology is founded on an underlying theology, even when it starts with an outright rejection of religion.

> While the Nietzschean tracing of cultural formations to the will-to-power still results in a 'suspicion' of religion, it also tends to assert the inevitably religious or mythic-ritual shape that these formations must take. In this mode of suspicion, therefore, there ceases to be any social or economic reality that is permanently more 'basic' than religion.[12]

On this view, "secular discourse does not just 'borrow' inherently inappropriate modes of discourse from religion . . . but is actually constituted in its secularity by 'heresy' in relation to orthodox Christianity, or else a rejection of Christianity that is more 'neo-pagan' than simply anti-religious."[13] Milbank credits MacIntyre himself with playing a significant part in promoting a general recognition of "the critical non-avoidability of the theological and metaphysical."[14] But MacIntyre does not follow through his insight that standards of rational accountability are immanent to traditions, which can only be regarded as discrete modes of enquiry to the extent that they are incommensurable. What incommensurability signifies in this context is that philosophy cannot accommodate Christianity without being transformed into theology. The alternative is to reduce theology to philosophy, and thus to relapse into the project of universal translation which is the focus of MacIntyre's critique of modernity, and whose crowning achievement is Hegel's demythologization of Christianity.

This does not mean that one cannot envision a Christian way of life without being a Christian, otherwise no one would be able to make the transition to faith. To clarify what can be known about it from the outside is the task of Johannes Climacus, whose ideas are presented as experimental hypotheses, afterwards revoked (CUP 547) or, in postmodern jargon, written 'under erasure'. But as Evans points out, there is a qualitative difference between understanding something as a possibility and living it in actuality: "The person who only knows Christianity objectively - as a set of doctrines, for example, or as historical facts - does not even know what Christianity is, since Christianity is essentially subjectivity, existential communication that is accepted by acting on it."[15] Since morality is a question of

doing rather than thinking, either it is Christian or not. And on MacIntyre's own admission, moral philosophy is not a unified field of enquiry but a heterogeneous collection of emotivist, contractarian, consequentialist etc., theories and practices, each in a sad state of disarray. Christianity, however, begins where MacIntyre's philosophy leaves off, while Christian morality "is a thing *so* strange, that it must be declared immoral or amoral according to all other human norms and codes of morality."[16]

2. 3 Paradox and Contradiction

For Kierkegaard, the distinctive mark of Christianity is the 'absolute paradox' of the God-man, the one who makes it possible for eternal happiness to have a beginning in time. The concept has a structural parallel in what might be called the 'postmodern paradox', by which I mean the alleged self-contradiction which in one form or another is the focus of all of MacIntyre's criticisms of Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean philosophy. Since all contradictions are dialectical, and therefore belong to what Nietzsche calls the 'slave mentality' of Platonism and Christianity, then unless he turns out to be just another dialectician, the charge of self-contradiction fails to find any purchase. But rather than refute it, I will try to show that the charge rebounds on the plaintiff, by arguing, with Kierkegaard, that all philosophy is caught in the fold of an inescapable paradox, for existence itself is a paradox before which the natural understanding is impotent. When philosophy tries to resolve it, it either becomes ensnared in logical contradictions or is compelled to abolish the principle of non-contradiction.

MacIntyre finds nothing problematic in the perspectivist claim as an ontological proposition, perhaps because, at one level, it is indistinguishable from his own account of the cultural and historical constitution of all rationality.

> So the assertion that there *are* a multiplicity of perspectives as a counterpart to the denial that there is one world, 'the world,' beyond and sustaining all perspectives, may itself seem to have an ontological, non-perspectival import and status. If this is so, Nietzsche thus understood will have been restored to conventional academic philosophy, an apparent radical at one level but not at all so at another. (TRV 36)

But Nietzsche emphatically rules out the possibility of such a non-perspectival standpoint, and this, according to MacIntyre, is a fatal blow to the concept of responsibility, for it eliminates any possible appeal to a common, objective substratum of 'reality' as a basis for shared standards of rational justification. With no fixed standpoint from which to launch her critique, the genealogist must adopt a series of temporary stances, such as that of the respectable academic, in order to be heard at all. But the genealogical practice of unmasking others betrays a fixity of purpose and a covert narrative continuity that can only be ascribed to "a self not to be dissolved into masks and moments . . . a self which just insofar as it can adopt

alternative perspectives is itself not perspectival, but persistent and substantial." (TRV 54).As evidence for the 'timeless' continuities of identity and reference which he views as the necessary conditions for a meaningful exchange between author and reader (TRV 45), MacIntyre cites the inability of Nietzsche's *epigoni* to free themselves from these constraints:

> It is one sign of the inescapable character of this metaphysics of reading that those who proscribe it so often fail nonetheless in the eyes of their post-Nietzschean colleagues to eliminate all traces of it from their own work. Thus Heidegger has accused Nietzsche of retaining in his thought an unacknowledged metaphysical remnant and so Derrida has in turn similarly accused Heidegger. (TRV 46)

None of them, apparently, entertains the remotest suspicion of the purely parasitic and ultimately self-consuming nature of their project:

> The genealogist has up till now characteristically been one who writes *against*, who exposes, who subverts, who interrupts and disrupts. But what has in consequence very rarely, if at all, attracted explicit genealogical scrutiny is the extent to which the genealogical stance is dependent for its concepts and its modes of argument, for its theses and its style, upon a set of contrasts between it and that which it aspires to overcome - the extent, that is, to which it is inherently derivative from and even parasitic upon its antagonisms . . . drawing its necessary sustenance from that which it professes to have discarded. (TRV 215)

By dismissing the notion of objective truth, Nietzsche and his followers have opened the flood-gates to an unlimited range of interpretative possibilities, all equally arbitrary. Worse still, in rejecting the authority of both the Socratic dialectic and Augustinian confession, they have eliminated all the key features of accountability and rendered unintelligible those ascriptions of identity and intention which the postmodern text is nonetheless unable to eliminate (TRV 203). "Is the genealogist not self-indulgently engaged in exempting his or her utterances from the treatment to which everyone else's is subjected?" (TRV 210)

MacIntyre attributes Nietzsche's aversion for dialectic to his desire to avoid any prior commitment to the traditional conception of the interdependence of rational and moral excellence. "For he perceived correctly that only by breaking with the dialectic at the outset could one hope to escape from arriving at Platonic and Aristotelian conclusions." (TRV 60) The problem here, of course, is the lack of any neutral framework within which to conduct the argument for and against dialectics. In the midst of his quarrel with Hegel, it occurs to Climacus that "[i]f there is to be any mediation in this case (and let us not forget that mediation is a speculative category), it will mean that speculative thought judges between itself and its own opposite, and therefore plays the double role of litigant and judge." (CUP 336) Someone might reply that Kierkegaard himself was an eminently dialectical thinker, or else that I have smuggled in an illegitimate identification of the Socratic dialectic with Hegelian speculation. Both these points raise the question of exactly what is meant by 'the' dialectic. We have seen that Kierkegaard's understanding of its scope and function is at odds with that of Hegel, whereas MacIntyre's dialectic only stops short of Hegel's by refusing to foreclose the history of philosophy. But whatever MacIntyre means by "Platonic and Aristotelian

conclusions," he is evidently referring to something more substantial than Socratic ignorance. This suggests that the question should be: 'which dialectic?'

What remains invisible to MacIntyre and Nietzsche alike is the distinction between the subjective and objective, or existential and speculative dialectics, which Climacus attributes respectively to Socrates and Plato (but only in the *Postscript*, no such distinction is made in the *Fragments*). He reminds us that Socrates resolved the *Meno* dilemma[17] by positing the thesis that all knowledge is recollection (*anamnesis*), which then became for Plato a demonstration for the pre-existence of the soul, secure in its retrogressive possession of eternity (PF 9-13). This is the model of learning that not only underpins both classical and modern idealism but all theories which presuppose an immanent capacity for acquiring genuine knowledge, such as naturalism and scientific humanism. Socrates, however, recognized that the pursuit of knowledge can become a distraction from the task of existence.

> This proposition is not for Socrates a cue to the speculative enterprise, and hence he does not follow it up; essentially it becomes a Platonic principle. Here the way swings off; Socrates concentrates essentially upon accentuating existence, while Plato forgets this and loses himself in speculation. (CUP 184)

In a footnote in the *Postscript* Climacus explains that the proposition that all knowledge is recollection is indeed common to Socrates and Plato as stated in the *Fragments*, "only that Socrates is always departing from it, in order to exist. . . . the Platonic tendency, on the other hand, is to pursue the lure of recollection and immanence." (CUP 185) A crucial part of my argument hinges on this distinction, for I want to suggest that both MacIntyre and Nietzsche tend to confuse existential contradictions with logical ones, MacIntyre in order to resolve them by dialectical argument, Nietzsche in order to demonstrate the irrelevance of logic and dialectics to the fundamental questions of human existence. Up to a point, this indicates that Nietzsche is closer than MacIntyre to Kierkegaard's way of thinking, but Climacus is far from wanting to deny the validity of reason and logic in the realm of objective knowledge. Nor does he want to deny that human existence is dialectical; the point is not to confuse the existential dialectic of spiritual development with the process of rational reflection, which is always an abstraction from existence.

> It is not denied that objective thought has validity; but in connection with all thinking where subjectivity must be accentuated, it is a misunderstanding. If a man occupied himself, all his life through, solely with logic, he would nevertheless not become logic; he must therefore himself exist in different categories. (CUP 85-6)

For Climacus, no philosophy - and I take this to include the post-metaphysical philosophy which he did so much to make possible - can lend significance to one's life as a whole, for intellectual activity is only one aspect of existence, and a life of objective enquiry signifies an absolute commitment to a relative end, which is the mark of the aesthetic. "Socratically speaking, subjectivity is untruth if it refuses to understand that subjectivity is truth, but, for

example, desires to become objective." (CUP 185) However, it is possible to distinguish the will to truth from the sceptical activity of genealogy by regarding it as the Nietzschean 'equivalent' of Kierkegaard's category of objectivity.

In order to bring out the full implications of the difference between Socrates and Plato I will need to summarise the argument of the *Fragments*, where Climacus employs the methodology of the Socratic dialectic in order to undermine the Socratic hypothesis. As we recall, the Socratic subject already possesses the capacity to know the truth, which has, as it were, been temporarily forgotten. If, however, there is a truth which is inaccessible to recollection, then existence becomes a paradox - this is the conclusion of the 'thought-experiment' in which Climacus 'invents' Christianity as an alternative hypothesis to the Socratic (PF 13-22), a hypothesis which contains within it the thesis that it could not have been invented by a human thinker (PF 36). (Although he goes to great pains to show that one cannot prove the existence of God (PF 39-44), still less the paradox of His entry into history, in advancing such a hypothesis he seems inadvertently to have done what cannot be done.) According to the alternatives of the *Meno* problem, subjectivity is either truth or untruth. In the Socratic model the teacher can be no more than an occasion for eliciting the learner's own capacity for self-knowledge, an occasion which is immediately swallowed up in the recollection of eternity, "because in the same moment I discover that I have known the truth from eternity without knowing it, in the same instant that moment is hidden in the eternal" (PF 13). This is the situation of the reader for whom MacIntyre's version of events has acted as "an occasion for self-recognition and self-knowledge." (WJ 394) But if things are to be otherwise, then the *moment* at which the teaching is imparted becomes decisive, for at that moment the eternal truth comes into being.

The only alternative to the Socratic is that the learner is outside the truth, and so must undergo a transformation or *conversion* (PF 18) in order to be able to receive it. If subjectivity is untruth, the teacher must not only bring the truth but also the *condition* for acquiring it, otherwise we are back with the Socratic and the immanent capacity for self-knowledge, which is ultimately knowledge of God (PF 11). The name for this condition is *faith* (PF 59), and the teaching which is its object is the figure of the teacher himself, "for the god's presence is not incidental to his teaching but is essential." (PF 55) Such a teacher is therefore better described as a deliverer or *saviour* (PF 17). If Socrates were to attract a circle of disciples he would not only contradict his teaching but do them positive harm, by falsely appropriating what belongs to the learner - this is why Kierkegaard favours the indirect mode of communication made possible by his multiple authorship. If, on the other hand, the moment is to be decisive, the Socratic principle - that the teacher can be no more than a midwife who assists the learner to self-knowledge - only holds insofar as "I can discover my own untruth only by myself."(PF 14) Once the condition has been restored, however, "that which was valid for the Socratic is again

valid." (PF 63) This is an instance of *repetition* (to be discussed in the next chapter), the Christian alternative to the way of recollection.

Perhaps the most mysterious aspect of all this is the paradoxical conclusion that I myself must somehow be responsible for having forfeited the condition, for the self cannot be untruth by virtue of what it received from its creator. The name for this self-imposed loss of freedom is *sin* (PF 15). "Through the moment, the learner becomes untruth; the person who knew himself becomes confused about himself and instead of self-knowledge he acquires the consciousness of sin etc." (PF 51) It is sin that constitutes the absolute qualitative difference between God and humankind, and the consciousness of sin that decisively separates this model of learning from the Platonic-Socratic. For MacIntyre, by contrast, the acquisition of rational and moral excellence is an immanental process of recollection wherein the novice undergoes an "initiation into the practices within which dialectical and confessional interrogation and self-interrogation are institutionalized."

> And that initiation has to take the form of a reappropriation by each individual of the history of the formation and transformations of belief through those practices, so that the history of thought and practice is reenacted and the novice learns from that reenactment not only what the best theses, arguments, and doctrines to emerge so far have been, but also how to rescrutinize them so that they become genuinely his or hers and how to extend them further in ways which will expose him or her to those interrogations through which accountability is realized. (TRV 201)

That is a reasonable description of what is being attempted here, albeit within a conception of tradition which includes both MacIntyre and his opponents. However, it is important to not to forget that historical investigation can, at best, only provide approximations, and "[i]t is a self-contradiction and therefore comical, to be infinitely interested in that which in its maximum still always remains an approximation." (CUP 32) More seriously still, the process of recollection is radically disrupted by the disclosure of sin, as something whose origin cannot be recuperated by reminiscence. "In the struggle to actualize the task of ethics, sin shows itself . . . as something that withdraws deeper and deeper as a deeper and deeper presupposition, as a presupposition that goes beyond the individual." (CA 19) This endless withdrawal of the ethical horizon eventually leads back to the concept of hereditary sin, which renders the history of the individual commensurable with that of the race as a whole (CA 29). Thus the relative innocence of pagan antiquity is comparable to that of a child.

> The concepts of guilt and sin in their deepest sense do not emerge in paganism. If they had emerged, paganism would have perished upon the contradiction that one became guilty by fate. Precisely this is the greatest contradiction, and out of this contradiction Christianity breaks forth. (CA 97-8)

The attempt to retrace one's guilt to its origin comes up against a dimension of time which is inaccessible to recollection. The situation resembles the primordial dialogue between self and Other which Levinas identifies as the site of the ethical demand, the Saying that is prior to

whatever philosophical or ontological claim is contained in the Said. (OB 5-9) This is "[a] past more ancient than any present, a past which was never present," (OB 24) like the past in which language itself first emerged. As Michael Weston argues, for both Levinas and Kierkegaard, individuation or becoming a self is only achieved by accepting the infinite ethical requirement exerted on the self by the claim of the Other.

> The I becomes I, the irreducible singularity, only as an infinite and irreplaceable responsibility, as the never-ending giving of what I possess, the content I have acquired, to the Other. . . . The I and the Other exist in a sense beyond and prior to conceptuality, the one as the very upsurge of the love of life which is irreducibly personal, the Other as the putting of the I in question, a summons to responsibility, to giving without return.[18]

Insofar as Levinas' concept of the 'Other' is devoid of content, which would reduce it to the same, it corresponds to what Climacus calls 'the unknown', a purely negative concept referred to throughout the *Fragments* as 'the god' (a conceit later taken up by Heidegger), and defined as the frontier against which the understanding continually collides when it aspires to absolute knowledge (PF 44).

> Defined as the absolutely different, it seems to be at the point of being disclosed, but not so, because the understanding cannot even think the absolutely different, it cannot absolutely negate itself but uses itself for that purpose and consequently thinks the difference in itself, which it thinks by itself. It cannot absolutely transcend itself and therefore thinks as above itself only the sublimity that it thinks by itself. (PF 45)

In other words, God cannot be an object of enquiry. The difference between Plato and Socrates, and by extension MacIntyre and Kierkegaard, can be seen most clearly in the relationship to God exhibited by their respective modes of enquiry:

> *When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. . . . If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true.* (CUP 178)

To bring God to light objectively "is in all eternity impossible, because God is a subject, and therefore only exists for subjectivity in inwardness." (CUP 178)

When it comes to the kind of knowledge that is of essential concern to the existing individual, the paths quickly diverge, and "while objective knowledge rambles comfortably along by way of the long road of approximation without being impelled by the urge of passion, subjective knowledge counts every delay a deadly peril, and the decision so infinitely important and so instantly pressing that it is as if the opportunity had already passed." (CUP 179) While Plato goes on to initiate the whole project of philosophy which culminates in Hegel and Nietzsche, Socratic ignorance becomes an analogue of faith, reflecting the uncertainty of all objective and historical knowledge for anyone but God (CUP 107), and the insight that truth must therefore be sought in one's subjective relation to the unknown. What prevented Socrates

from embarking on the speculative enterprise was the experience, at the limit of his understanding, of becoming "almost bewildered about himself when he came up against the different; whether he was a more curious monster than Typhon or whether there was something divine in him." (PF 47) This is enough to place him "fundamentally in advance of speculative philosophy" so that "he presents, when properly delineated, a certain analogous resemblance to that which the experiment [of the *Fragments*] described as in truth going beyond the Socratic." (CUP 185) What he lacked was the consciousness of sin, which only the god can provide.

If truth is subjectivity, belief and doubt are primarily acts of will, grounded in resolution rather than the outcome of dialectical arguments, "which are nothing more than outer fortifications."(PF 84) The Christian is someone who ventures everything, with the passion of the infinite, on something that is, to say the least, an objective uncertainty. According to Climacus, this uncertainty is unavoidable because the truth itself - the meaning of life which is the *telos* of all philosophy - is a paradox, though perhaps not in itself, that is, for God - we are no position to know.

> How does the paradox come into being? By putting the eternal, essential truth into juxtaposition with existence. Hence when we posit such a conjunction within the truth itself, the truth becomes a paradox. The eternal truth has come into being in time: this is the paradox. (CUP 187)

The absolute paradox is the historical event of the Incarnation, which effectuates the birth of the eternal in the life of the individual at the moment of conversion. The moment is no longer a vanishing instant of time but becomes an atom of eternity (CA 88). (For a fuller treatment of this see the discussion of repetition in Chapter 3.) The paradox impinges on philosophy where reason collides with the frontier of the thinkable and tries to think the absolutely different. This impulse of thinking to go beyond itself is what Climacus calls 'the paradoxical passion of the understanding' that seeks its own downfall (PF 37). Its downfall occurs when the chain of reason-giving reaches its terminus and discovers its ultimate groundlessness. "The paradoxical passion of the understanding is, then, continually colliding with this unknown . . . But a frontier is expressly the passion's torment, even though it is also its incentive." (PF 44) The process is analogous to the paradox of erotic love, which, though grounded in the passion of self-love, colludes with the other in its own annihilation (PF 48).

> A person lives undisturbed in himself, and then awakens the paradox of self-love as love for another, for one missing. (Self-love is the ground or goes to the ground of all love, which is why any religion of love we might conceive would presuppose . . . to love oneself in order to command loving the neighbour as oneself.) (PF 39)

Kierkegaard defines the task of existence as the process of becoming a self, or becoming subjective. We can clarify this by enquiring, with Heidegger, into the nature of the *telos* or for-the-sake-of (the major premise of the practical syllogism[19]) that terminates the

chain of reason-giving. "What is the final purpose for which humans exist?" (MFL 185) The question is deceptive, for the objective answer which it seems to invite cannot be forthcoming, because "the sense of the question itself is such that it is, in each case, only the questioner alone who can pose the question in its real sense and answer it." (MFL 185) The question can only be of interest insofar as it includes the situation of the questioner, where it stands revealed as the basic structure of human existence. "To be for its own sake is an essential determination of the being of that being we call Dasein." (MFL 189) Or as Climacus puts it, "[e]xistence constitutes the highest interest of the existing individual, and his interest in his existence constitutes his reality." (CUP 279) Because Dasein is essentially defined by selfhood, it is able to "expressly choose itself as a self. The 'can' here includes also its flight from choice." (MFL 189) The reality of this choice depends on the fact that Dasein is grounded in freedom, as does the willing effort without which the for-the-sake-of would be unintelligible. "Only a free being can be unfree." (MFL 191). Lest this emphasis on selfhood and individuation be taken for a prescription for the solipsistic individualism of the isolated modern subject, in a passage where (for once) he acknowledges his debt to Kierkegaard (MFL 190-1), Heidegger explains that egoicity or I-ness is as constitutive of the thou as of the I, so that without it there could be no I - thou relation.

> In choosing itself Dasein really chooses precisely its being-with others and precisely its being among others of a different character. . . . Only because Dasein can expressly choose itself on the basis of its selfhood can it be committed to others. And only because, in being toward itself as such, Dasein can understand anything like a "self" can it therefore attend at all to a thou-self. Only because Dasein, constituted by the for-the-sake-of, exists in selfhood, only for this reason is anything like human community possible. (MFL 190)

Only in subjectivity is there anything decisive, for objective certainty only pertains to the realm of necessity where everything is always already decided. This is the domain of metaphysics, for only the necessary necessarily *is*. Existential thinking is concerned with becoming, which never occurs by necessity but is always the outcome, at whatever remove, of a freely-acting cause. "As soon as coming into existence is definitively reflected upon, even an inference from natural law is not evidence of the necessity of any coming into existence." (PF 75) Here, everything turns on a mistake made by Aristotle (PF 74-5),[20] and compounded by Hegel, who claimed that:

> real possibility, because it contains the other moment, actuality, is already itself necessity. Therefore what is really possible can no longer be otherwise; under the particular conditions and circumstances something else cannot follow. Real possibility and necessity are therefore only seemingly different; this is an identity which does not have to become but is already presupposed and lies at their base.[21]

Since the essence of the necessary is to be, Aristotle's thesis that everything necessary must also be possible makes necessity into a synthesis of possibility and actuality, which leads in turn to a fusion of logical and causal determinism (which is why Aristotle was forced to

postulate two kinds of possibility), in which history follows the path of the speculative dialectic. "If only one way is possible, then the [*telos*] is not outside but in the progress itself - indeed, behind it, just as in the progress of immanence." (PF 80-1) But if all coming into existence occurs in freedom, and never by way of a logical ground, then the past can be no more necessary than the future (PF 77). A similar point is made by Heidegger, who points out that the fundamental principles of metaphysics are, in the following order, the principle of identity, A=A, (ultimately the identity of identity and difference) together with its counterpart, the principle of non-contradiction, and the principle of sufficient reason or principle of ground. In a reversal of their usual sequence, Heidegger's 'destruction' of metaphysics begins with a demonstration that the principle of ground is prior to that of identity (MFL 218).

> . . . insofar as these necessary truths are subject to the principle of non-contradiction as principle of their reducibility, i.e., of their demonstrability, the *principium reddendae rationis* pertains to them also. Indeed, one could and must say, conversely, that the latter principle is more primordial than the principle of non-contradiction. (MFL 53)

According to Heidegger, although the principle of ground was first explicitly formulated by Leibniz,[22] like Nietzsche's eternal spider,[23] it lurks unthought behind all philosophy since Plato. As Deleuze puts it, "[e]very historical law is arbitrary, but what is not arbitrary, what is prehistoric and generic, is the law of obeying laws." (NP 133) For MacIntyre, the *telos* of philosophical enquiry consists in the comprehensive demonstration of its first principles, an end which is achieved by means of a dialectic in which the law of non-contradiction is paramount. But in this essentially circular process an exchange of predication takes place between those principles and the activity of grounding them, in which the *telos* itself turns out to be dependent on the capacity to realize a *telos*. In other words:

> The for-the-sake-of is not something adrift, but it temporalizes itself in *freedom*. As ecstatic self-projection on its own capacity-for-being, freedom understands itself from out of this capacity and at the same time holds this capacity before itself as responsibility. Freedom is consequently the *origin of anything like ground*. (MFL 213-14)

Thus, the construction of chains of ontic reasoning within the sciences is grounded in freedom, for where there are laws there must first of all be freedom, which is likewise the ground of anything like responsibility or commitment. Freedom, then, is the essence of Dasein, but in a dialectical twist that replicates Kierkegaard's stage of ethical despair, this is only experienced as unfreedom. Where Heidegger departs from Kierkegaard is in conceiving the remedy in terms of a world-historical task:

> The powerlessness is metaphysical, i.e., to be understood as essential; it cannot be removed by reference to the conquest of nature, to technology, which rages about in the 'world' today like an unshackled beast; for this domination of nature is the real proof for the metaphysical powerlessness of Dasein, which can only attain freedom in its history. (MFL 215)

Climacus argues that this kind of thinking ignores the whole problem of the relationship between the individual and the whole. "If world-history is the history of the human race, it follows, as a matter of course, that it does not show forth the ethical." (CUP 138) Like Hegel and Nietzsche, Heidegger overleaps the ethical, which "is subject to a dialectic that is individual to each human being precisely as this particular human being." (CUP 138)

The will to truth at work in philosophy and science seeks to comprehend the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. In order to achieve its end, the understanding tries to resolve every paradox in its path, either by reducing it to a logical contradiction and eliminating one of its components or by combining them both in a higher synthesis. But when it tries to think the absolute paradox (for instance when it tries to work out the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human freedom) reason itself stumbles into logical contradictions, or finds itself compelled to use self-contradictory expressions,[24] as in the profusion of oxymorons to be found in the texts of mediaeval mysticism. This is where I see a parallel between the intersection of time and eternity in the paradox of the God-man and the contradictions arising from our consciousness of historical contingency. As in the case of the individual's relation to the eternal in time, the contradictory juxtaposition of universal and particular in the relativist claim is not a logical opposition, but part of a dialectic or dialogue that essentially takes place in the first person, "from an I in terms of *his or her* existential position to another who can receive it in terms of *his or her* own."[25] Thus, as Gadamer says, "the reflective argument is out of place here. For we are dealing not with relationships between judgements which have to be kept free from contradictions, but with living relationships."[26]

Having been presented with a paradox which can neither be reduced nor mediated, the understanding either recoils in offence or surrenders its imperial pretensions. In either case it is as much a question of suffering a passion as of actively making a decision. But the possibility of offence furnishes an indirect test of the veracity of the paradox, which is not the result of a mistaken calculation but confronts the one offended as something external.

> When the understanding wants to have pity upon the paradox and assist it to an explanation, the paradox . . . considers it appropriate for the understanding to do that, for is that not what philosophers are for - to make supernatural things ordinary and trivial? When the understanding cannot get the paradox into its head, this does not have its origin in the understanding but in the paradox itself, which was paradoxical enough to call the understanding a clod and a dunce who at best can say "yes" and "no" to the same thing, which is not good theology. (PF 52-3)

Since the absolute paradox refuses to be tamed by reason, and faith must believe against the understanding, not only is the paradox the object of faith, but faith itself is a paradox. "How else could it have as its object the paradox and be happy in its relation to it?" (PF 65) The paradoxical nature of reality explains the ultimately aporetic character of secular reason, as well as the pathos of the Utopian project of secular politics. It also explains the bankruptcy of rational theology, for faith is the relation to the incomprehensible, which is why the relation is

one of faith and not cognition. But as a prescription for irrationalism this would invite the conclusion that everything apart from stuff is nonsense.

> So the believing Christian not only possesses but uses his understanding, respects the universal-human, does not put it down to lack of understanding if somebody is not a Christian; but in relation to Christianity he believes against the understanding and in this case also uses understanding . . . to make sure that he believes against the understanding. Nonsense therefore he cannot believe against the understanding, for precisely the understanding will discern that it is nonsense and will prevent him from believing it; but he makes so much use of the understanding that he becomes aware of the incomprehensible, and then he holds to this, believing against the understanding. (CUP 504)

As well as illustrating the analogy between faith and Socratic ignorance, this passage defines both the scope and limit of MacIntyre's, or indeed any, philosophical project. It thus belongs together with Milbank's description of Gregory of Nyssa's account of the relationship between the mind and God:

> Although, he says, the mind cannot comprehend the incomprehensible, the incomprehensible may incomprehensibly be mirrored in our mind. For were the incomprehensible to be simply *outside* the comprehensible, it would be limited by the comprehensible (or circumscribable) and would therefore *no longer* be incomprehensible. (Here Gregory is alert to what we should today think of as 'set paradox'; this is an aspect of his superseding of philosophical dialectic).[27]

Whereas, for Kierkegaard, the function of reason is to identify the paradox *and no more*, MacIntyre conducts an objective enquiry into the ground of morality, employing the logic of non-contradiction in order to refute those who deny the relevance of logic to ethical or existential concerns. Once he has negotiated the 'Nietzschean delay' of incommensurability and contextuality, at least in principle if not in actuality (this is the hiatus between the 'Hegelian' logic of his own argument and the undecidability of its outcome), he reverts to the traditional framework of the hypothetical imperative, whose goal is the reconciliation of the individual with the universal. Since no distinction is made between the hypothetical and the categorical, the universal and the absolute, or the ethical and the religious, it is assumed that the route to God passes through the universal-human. But as we have seen, for Kierkegaard, the discovery of sin means that the route has to double back, for the desired ideality of ethics can only be approached by way of "the religious ideality that precisely is the ideality of actuality, and therefore just as desirable as that of esthetics and not as impossible as the ideality of ethics." (CA 17)

An alternative response to Nietzsche is suggested by MacIntyre's outline of a Thomist genealogy of genealogy. "Where," he asks, "would such a genealogy have to begin?"

> The answer is: with what Aquinas says about the roots of intellectual blindness in moral error, with the misdirection of the intellect by the will and with the corruption of the will by the sin of pride, both that pride which is an inordinate desire to be superior and that pride which is an inclination to contempt for God. Where Nietzsche saw the individual will as a fiction, as part of a mistaken psychology which conceals from view the impersonal will to power, the Thomist can elaborate . . . an account of the will to power as an intellectual fiction

> disguising the corruption of the will. The activity of unmasking is itself to be understood as a mask for pride. (TRV 147)

Leaving aside the question of how pride can be compatible with the erasure of personal will, it is worth pointing out that to accuse one's opponent of pride is to inform against oneself by making a display of humility. However, pride is also the ruling passion of the most virulent of the types of despair discussed by Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death*, and Nietzsche's hostility to Christianity is just what one would expect from someone in the state of demonic despair in which the self wills in defiance to be itself, (SD 67) denying its dependence on that which establishes it as a self. With the doctrine of the eternal return, Nietzsche envisages the possibility of endowing his creative choices and his tragic affirmation of existence with infinite significance (more on this Chapter 4). "But just because it is despair through the aid of the eternal, in a certain sense it is very close to the truth, and just because it lies very close to the truth, it is infinitely far away." (SD 67) On this view, the doctrine of the eternal return is the kind of infinitizing hypothesis made possible by what Anti-Climacus calls "the despairing misuse of the eternal within the self to will in despair to be oneself." (SD 67)

> In order in despair to will to be oneself, there must be consciousness of an infinite self. This infinite self, however, is really only . . . the most abstract possibility of the self. And this is the self that a person in despair wills to be, severing the self from any relation to a power that has established it, or severing it from the idea that there is such a power. With the help of this infinite form, the self in despair wants to be master of itself or to create itself . . . to determine what he will have or not have in his concrete self. . . . Like Prometheus stealing fire from the gods, this is stealing from God the thought . . . that God pays attention to one; instead, the self in despair is satisfied with paying attention to itself, which is supposed to bestow infinite interest and significance upon his enterprises, but it is precisely this that makes them imaginary constructions. (SD 67-9)

The deeper the despair, the greater the possibility of repentance (SD 59-60). Despair at its minimum is ignorance of even being despair, or of having anything eternal in the self. At its maximum it is personified by the devil.

> The devil's despair is the most intensive despair, for the devil is sheer spirit and hence unqualified consciousness and transparency; there is no obscurity in the devil that could serve as a mitigating excuse. Therefore his despair is the most absolute defiance. (SD 42)

It seems to me that the intensification of consciousness expressed in Nietzsche's thinking comes close to the dialectical extreme at which despair achieves full self-transparency, a condition which is, in a sense, closer to Christianity than any rational apologetic. If this is the case, there is reason to question MacIntyre's reading of the will to power, which overlooks the extent to which Scholastic metaphysics constitutes the matrix of subsequent developments. As John Caputo remarks: "However strange it may seem to Thomistic ears, St. Thomas' is a metaphysics of power, not really as far removed from the will-to-power as Thomists like to think. It conceives of Being in terms of power, efficiency, action, force, making."[28] This works both ways: the will to power is as much an aspect of the forces at work in the

metaphysics it supplants as the latter was a configuration of will to power - each is the expression of its own epoch. "Interpretation reveals its complexity when we realise that a new force can only appear and appropriate an object by first of all putting on the mask of the forces which are already in possession of the object." (NP 5) "Furthermore, a doctrine only lets itself become outdated when it has spread its principles and hidden its postulates in the doctrines which succeed it." (NP 73) So perhaps there is not such a distance between classical and postmodern thought as MacIntyre would have us believe. Indeed, his conflict with genealogy can be viewed as an episode in a dialectic of stasis and flux, being and becoming, identity and difference, which can be traced back to Parmenides and Heraclitus. Likewise, the genealogical enterprise can be seen as an immanent critique of the entire metaphysical tradition rather than an incommensurable mode of enquiry, for as Derrida, *pace* MacIntyre, knows perfectly well:

> *There is no sense* in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language - no syntax and no lexicon - which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.[29]

According to Simon Critchley, deconstruction attempts to reverse the philosophical reduction of difference to sameness by uncovering the residue of otherness in the text of philosophy from which it is possible to question that reduction. This involves a double reading which consists "first, of a patient and scholarly commentary following the main lines of the text's dominant interpretation, and second, in locating an interruption or alterity within that dominant interpretation where reading discovers insights within a text to which that text is blind"[30] While commentary and criticism remain locked into the framework of metaphysics, the structural critique of metaphysics must attempt to locate a site which cannot be thought within that framework. In a way that is reminiscent of MacIntyre's account of Aquinas, Derrida is caught in the double-bind of belonging and not belonging to a tradition. The same difficulty arises for Levinas when he tries to convey the Saying in the Said. "It indeed shows itself in the said, but does so only after the event, betrayed, foreign to the said of being; it shows itself in it as a contradiction." (OB 135)

To the extent that modernity remains covertly theistic, employing conceptual structures which imply an ordering principle or *archê*, its deconstruction, like Nietzsche's 'death of God', comes under the rubric of negative theology. Graham Ward observes that "[i]t is the acknowledgement of an ineradicable metaphysical complicity, which Derrida is concerned to expose as frankly theological in its presuppositions, that gives rise to theological motifs and explicit theological references within Derrida's work."[31] The proximity of deconstruction to negative theology allows him to criticize Heidegger in a way that MacIntyre cannot, given his allegiance to the positive tradition of onto-theology which Heidegger repudiates. Referring to the statement made by Heidegger (responding to students at the University of Zurich in 1951) which Marion uses as an epigraph to *God Without Being* - "If I

were yet to write a theology, as I am sometimes tempted to do, the word 'being' ought not to appear there"[32] - Derrida writes:

> In fact, since Being is not (a being) and in truth is nothing (that is), what difference is there between writing *Being*, this Being which is not, and writing *God*, this God of whom Heidegger also says that He is not? . . . Hasn't Heidegger written what he says he would have liked to write, a theology *without* the word *being*? But didn't he also write what he says should not be written, what he should not have written, namely a theology that is opened, dominated, and invaded by the word *being*?"[33]

However, the question of whether Heidegger has all along been adding to the very tradition he thought he was destructuring is not the real issue. For the fact is that both modes of interpretation, working from opposite directions, seek to cancel the structural opposition which both constitutes and divides them, such that each is fissured by its own margin. This is what I described at the outset as the paradox which is inherent in all philosophy.

> For there are two heterogeneous ways of erasing the difference between the signifier and the signified: one, the classic way, consists in reducing or deriving the signifier . . . the other, the one we are using here against the first one, consists in putting into question the system in which the preceding reduction functioned: first and foremost the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The *paradox* is that the metaphysical reduction of the sign needed the opposition it was reducing. The opposition is part of the system, along with the reduction. And what I am saying here can be extended to all the concepts and sentences of metaphysics . . . This is what allows these destroyers to destroy each other reciprocally - for example, Heidegger, considering Nietzsche, with as much lucidity and rigor as bad faith and misconstruction, as the last metaphysician, the last "Platonist." One could say the same for Heidegger himself, for Freud, or for a number of others, And today no exercise is more widespread.[34]

The 'proper' mode of interpretation is 'logocentrism' (MacIntyre), which "dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign." The 'non-proper' mode is dissemination (Nietzsche), which "affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of onto-theology - in other words, throughout his entire history - has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and end of play."[35]

Although these rival modes of enquiry are irreducible, there can be no question of choosing between them,[36] for each is structurally conditioned by the other, so that neither can claim a monopoly on meaning. The paradox - that each side requires the opposition that they both try to cancel out - points to the priority of the difference which unites them and keeps them apart. Thus the difference between MacIntyre and Nietzsche is more primordial than either of their positions, which turn out to be systematically related. As Kevin Hart explains:

> The deconstruction of metaphysics is accomplished by showing that the ground of a metaphysical discourse is linked systematically to a non-ground, held to be *prior* to the ground. In other words, the *archê* is shown to be related to an an-*archê*. Thus the difference between signified and signifier, for example, is metaphysical in that it can be understood only with respect to a prior notion of self-identity; while the deconstruction of the metaphysical conception of the sign is given in the demonstration that *both* 'self-identity' *and* 'difference'

have as their condition of possibility a mode of difference which is not defined with respect to a prior notion of self-identity.[37]

The implication of this for MacIntyre's scheme is that the differences by which it is structured - both the differences between traditions and the metaphysical difference between the implied, *de jure* victory of Thomism in *Whose Justice?* and the *de facto* inconclusiveness of *Three Rival Versions* - become its transcendental condition of possibility. I argued in Chapter 1 that, with Aquinas, Christianity both completes the classical tradition of moral enquiry and renders it obsolete as a resource for secular morality, for the equation of virtue with reason is superseded by the revelation of sin, so that the opposition vice/virtue has to be construed as sin/faith. MacIntyre maintains that the classical model of practical reason remains intact, providing a framework for the resolution of moral problems that is both highly systematic and radically open-ended. The tensions within his scheme arise from the conflict between the necessity for structure and his insistence that there is no possibility of completion. But Climacus makes the point that "[s]ystem and finality are pretty much one and the same, so much so that if the system is not finished, there is no system." (CUP 98) This is because "in a scientific structure the absence of the conclusion has the retroactive power to make the beginning doubtful and hypothetical, which is to say: unsystematic. So at least from the standpoint of dialectical fearlessness." (CUP 17)

To recapitulate: the contradictions which MacIntyre attributes to Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean thought arise from its claim to a universal mandate for the practice of dissolving universal concepts into irreducible particulars. The opposite tendency, the tendency of classical ethics as a branch of metaphysics, is to bring the individual under the general concept. The conflict played out within the framework of their mutual dependence is a facet of the paradox which Kierkegaard describes as constitutive of human existence, even of the truth itself. The link between the antinomies generated by philosophy and the paradox of Christianity is that the latter begins at the limit with which philosophy collides, in the 'movement of infinite resignation' which is the *end* (as both downfall and *telos*) of the 'paradoxical passion of the understanding'. The site of all these tensions and collisions is the relation within disjunction between the upper world and the lower in the structures of Platonic metaphysics: universal and particular, eternity and time, necessity and chance, being and becoming, signified and signifier, and above all the gap which opens up the field of ethics between the major and minor premise of the practical syllogism. Philosophy, both classical and modern, always tries to resolve these oppositions upwards - this is its essential task, the essentially theocratic dialectic of totalization. Sophistry and scepticism, on the other hand, whether antique or postmodern, are always trying to invert these structures, submerging the concept beneath the manifold of concrete particulars. In a sense, both are wrong, but insofar as the latter places the accent on existence and individuality rather than the abstract category of being, it is more hospitable to Christianity than MacIntyre's objectivism. To lose the eternal,

however, is just as disastrous as to abstract from the temporal. Rather, despite the absolute qualitative difference they must somehow be held together in an unresolvable tension. If the classical way of erasing the difference between signifier and signified by abstracting from the temporal can be viewed as the philosophical equivalent of the heresy of docetism, while the other way is analogous to what Anti-Climacus calls the "offense in relation to lowliness, that the one who passes himself off as God proves to be the lowly, poor, suffering, and finally powerless human being" (PC 102), the Incarnation bridges the chasm between signified and signifier without doing away with either.

> He is at once inside and outside the sign system; since Christ *is* God, what He signifies is signified in and of itself; He is what Derrida calls a 'transcendental signified'. Yet Christ is also a transcendental signifier. Miraculously formed, His body is uncontaminated by the very Fall which required the proliferation of signs and the distinction between presence and the sign of a presence.[38]

The task of existence, made possible by the entry of the eternal into human history, is to try to maintain a relationship in time to the eternal. Without the constant tension this involves, the post-metaphysical project, like its counterpart, tends to relapse into speculation. Thus, for Heidegger, the primordial difference becomes the spatio-temporal opening traversed by *Geist*: "Only this openness grants to speculative thinking the passage through what it thinks."[39] While his *Letter on Humanism* famously leaves plenty of room for a possible theology,[40] Heidegger prefers to dream of a return to aesthetic paganism, and constructs a metaphysical history which is essentially Hegel in reverse, a narrative in which Milbank detects a reappearance of the gnostic notions of an inevitable fall and evil as intrinsic to creation,[41] best dealt with by invoking Augustine's objections to pagan philosophy.

Viewed 'objectively', the paradox of relativism presents the same kind of logical difficulties as the particularity and historicity of Christian revelation, as does the charge of sectarianism often levelled at various forms of communitarian ethics. MacIntyre, however, claims that "there is nothing paradoxical at all in asserting that from within particular traditions assertions of universal import may be and are made" (AM 295). But according to the logic of identity, by which derivative truths are reducible to that from which they are derived, the only assertion to have a legitimate claim to universality on the basis of particularity is the claim that truth is perspectival, which converts the proposition back into a paradox. For Kierkegaard, no less than for Nietzsche, truth is subjectivity, which means that when it is viewed objectively the truth becomes perspectival. "When subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth, the truth becomes objectively a paradox; and the fact that the truth is objectively a paradox shows in its turn that subjectivity is the truth." (CUP 183) Christianity does not attempt, as MacIntyre does, to resolve the paradoxical character of existence; instead it accentuates it. For if truth is subjective, then as Johannes de silentio explains, in relation to God the individual is elevated above the universal:

> Then faith's paradox is this, that the single individual is higher than the universal, that the single individual (to recall a theological distinction less in vogue these days) determines his relation to the universal through his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute through his relation to the universal. . . . Unless this is how it is, faith has no place in existence, and faith is then a temptation, and Abraham is done for, since he gave into it. (FT 97-8)

It would be wrong to claim that the paradox at the heart of Christianity is the solution to that of philosophy as a whole, for the point is that the paradox is not resolved. Thus it is only Christianity, as a way of existing and thinking which is paradoxical from the outset, that has the resources to encompass the central aporia of postmodernity:

> How can philosophy . . . overcome itself without becoming a discourse which refuses its own legitimation? It is like the child standing in a cardboard box and attempting to lift herself off the ground by clutching the box's sides.[42]

As Graham Ward suggests, postmodernity cannot carry through its own project, for the deconstruction of secular reason and the disintegration of the modern subject have left it with nowhere to stand. "Only theology can embark on such a project, for theology cannot conceive of a secular space, nor an autonomous subject."[43] And if, as Marion suggests, "philosophy, like theology, also reaches something like 'God'" (GB 65), the deconstruction of philosophy opens up a (non-)site which deconstruction itself cannot name.

2. 4 Religiousness A and Religiousness B

In the previous section I called attention to two overlapping distinctions. The first is the distinction between the two hypotheses, the Platonic-Socratic and the Christian, which separates the God of philosophy from the God of faith. The second is the distinction between the Platonic way of speculation and the Socratic ignorance which Climacus sees as an analogue of faith. Not only does the difference between Socrates and Plato prefigure the more profound distinction between Christianity and Platonism, it also helps to account for the possibility of Derrida's "nondogmatic doublet of dogma . . . a *thinking* that 'repeats' the possibility of religion without religion." (GD 49) I have also tried to indicate how the three rival systems of theory and practice which MacIntyre presents as the only viable options currently on offer might be interpreted in terms of Kierkegaard's spheres of existence. In the Chapter 3 I will argue that the key to deciding between them, or, more to the point, making the transition from one to another, is not to be found in the dialectical reduction of incommensurability to logical incompatibility but in the Kierkegaardian concept of repetition. First, however, I need to introduce the distinction made in the *Postscript* between 'religiousness A' and 'religiousness B', for repetition is to B what recollection is to A, and I am trying to show that MacIntyre's appropriation of Thomism is at best an expression of

religiousness A. At worst, it can be read as an 'aesthetic-metaphysical' production in which the attempt to ground morality in objective reality amounts to an evasion of responsibility.

> For since the problem in question poses a decision, and since all decisiveness, as shown above, inheres in subjectivity, it is essential that every trace of an objective issue should be eliminated. If any such trace remains, it is at once a sign that the subject seeks to shirk something of the pain and crisis of the decision; that is, he seeks to make the problem to some degree objective. (CUP 115)

If this is true of choosing an ethical way of life, it applies *a fortiori* to the leap of faith that takes one from A to B: "It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists, if it exists at all; objectively, Christianity has absolutely no existence." (CUP 116)

Religiousness A and religiousness B correspond respectively to the alternative models of learning explored in the *Fragments*: the Platonic-Socratic (subjectivity is truth) and the Christian (subjectivity is untruth). In religiousness A, the individual enters by means of recollection into an immanent relationship to God as the eternal source of moral obligation. Since, for Kierkegaard, the ethical is always an expression of the infinite requirement that constitutes the debt of the creature to its creator, so that "some world religions and even some versions of Christianity would be classified by Climacus as falling under the category of ethical views of life,"[44] it is not possible to draw a sharp distinction between religiousness A and the ethical, which is why they often appear conjoined in the category of the 'ethico-religious'. Kierkegaard's categories do not constitute a rigid system; rather they provide a means to conceptualize a set of basic existential possibilities, the nuances of which are innumerable. As a discrete sphere, however, the ethical is rooted in self-reliance, the illusion of autonomy presupposed in the decision to become a responsible moral agent, whereas religiousness A is characterized by the consciousness that one can do nothing without God.

Religiousness B is set apart from A by the paradox, the sign of the breakthrough of transcendence into history. This is Christianity proper, which it is the mission of Climacus to render 'more difficult' - though not more difficult than it actually is, which is the same for everyone - in order to distinguish it not only from the tendency of his contemporaries to take being a Christian for granted, but also from the speculative tradition of Plato and Hegel, which dissolves the paradox in mediation and reduces revelation to something available to natural reason. As Evans notes, this "applies not only to Hegelianism, but to a tremendous amount of classical liberal theology and even to a great deal of theology today."[45] No judgement is made about the intrinsic worth of such projects, Climacus' purpose is only to highlight what is distinctive about Christianity. There is nothing wrong with natural theology as far as it goes, so long as it is not confused with objective thinking but remains an essentially interested mode of enquiry into the immanent relation that every person has to God, a relation experienced in "the delicious quickening of that lonely wellspring which exists in every man, that wellspring in which the Deity dwells in the profound stillness where everything is silent" (CUP 163) Nor

does Climacus wish to deny that religiousness A is a component of Christianity. In fact, the natural sense of religious pathos characteristic of A is a prerequisite for B (CUP 494-5), for in order to become conscious of the absolute paradox one must learn to distinguish it from all the relative paradoxes which can be resolved into contradictions, a task which involves all the passion of the understanding that wills its own downfall in the collision with the unknown, for its *telos* is outside itself and cannot therefore become an object for thought (God is a subject).

Climacus' account of ethical passion as the driving force in all human striving is not inconsistent with the Aristotelian concept of rational appetite (*prohairesis*). Its task is to transport the abstract possibilities disclosed by thought and language to the concrete circumstances of individual existence.

> This characteristic of existence recalls the Greek conception of Eros, as found in the *Symposium* . . . For Love is here evidently taken as identical with existence, or that, by virtue of which, life is lived in its entirety . . . Existence is the child that is born of the infinite and the finite, and is therefore a constant striving. It is for this reason that Love is constantly striving; or to say the same thing in other words, the thinking subject is an existing individual. It is only systematists and objective philosophers who have ceased to be human beings, and have become speculative philosophy in the abstract, an entity which belongs in the realm of pure being. (CUP 85)

Somewhat ironically, the philosopher of Being for the twentieth century seems to have the same thing in mind when he finds that the purposiveness manifest in the for-the-sake-of as the basic structure of being-in-the-world is driven by a preference-character, a *propensio in bonum* or *potius* ('rather than'), already emergent in Plato's philosophy as the idea of the good beyond being (MFL 115-6). "The for-the-sake-of . . . is not being itself, but surpasses being, and does so insofar as it outstrips beings in dignity and power." (MFL 219) The appropriate comportment toward such a world is wonder, which is where, as Climacus reminds us, ancient philosophy begins (PF 145). (Modern philosophy begins in doubt, which Climacus insists can never be overcome by reason but only by an act of will.) For Heidegger, apparently borrowing without acknowledgement from *The Concept of Anxiety*, the enabling condition for this sense of wonder is the emergence of 'the nothing' in the mood of fundamental anxiety, and the consequent realization that "Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing,"[46] i.e. beyond beings as a whole, which is what makes possible the enquiry beyond or over beings as a whole - *meta ta physika*. Wonder is the human response to the *rather than* that prompts the fundamental question of metaphysics: Why are there beings at all rather than nothing?

> Only because the nothing is manifest in the ground of Dasein can the total strangeness of beings overwhelm us. Only when the strangeness of beings overwhelms us does it arouse and evoke wonder. Only on the ground of wonder - the revelation of the nothing - does the "why?" loom before us. Only because the "why?" is possible as such can we in a definite way inquire into grounds, and ground them. Only because we can inquire and ground is the destiny of our existence placed in the hands of the researcher.[47]

As the final step in this demonstration suggests, for Heidegger, the 'rather than' has been appropriated by a way of revealing (Nietzsche's will to truth) whose destination turns out to be the technological ordering of the world and its inhabitants as 'standing reserve' or human and natural resources.[48] According to Deleuze and Guattari:

> To a certain degree, the traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the very outset: from the very first step that the Platonic logic of desire forces us to take, making us choose between *production* and *acquisition*. From the moment that we place desire on the side of acquisition, we make desire an idealistic (dialectical, nihilistic) conception, which causes us to look upon it as primarily a lack: a lack of an object, a lack of the real object.[49]

As Milbank points out, the traditional reasons for ethical activity always refer to a prior lack or deficiency, or something which constitutes a threat. "Here, at the beginning of every virtue, lies a failure to turn the other cheek."[50] By contrast, an ethic informed by the divine virtue of charity must be grounded in an 'absurd' assumption of superabundance. "Despite scarcity, despite our submission to the law it imposes, we must act as *if* there were plenitude, and no death, since to believe is to believe that this is what really pertains, despite the fall."[51]

Note that the role played in Kierkegaard's psychology by passion, as "an enduring emotion that is capable of giving shape and direction to human life,"[52] presupposes a natural theology that far exceeds anything that his Lutheran background might lead us to expect. "Every human life is religiously designed." (CA 105) But this is a natural theology whose function is to carry out the labour of the negative. We have already seen the part played in this by the paradoxical passion of the understanding, which takes us to the limit of what can be gained by means of recollection, to the point at which Socrates had to admit that "he no longer knew whether he was a more curious monster than Typhon or whether there was something divine in him." (PF 47) As Alastair Hannay explains:

> If the goal of human fulfilment goes against what we call human nature, human nature 'naturally' responds with anxiety and reluctance. . . . In a wider sense [however] it is indeed human nature to strive for spiritual fulfilment, even when that project seems to require the changing of human nature in the narrower sense. . . . If man is conceived as a being whose ethical task is to become spiritually developed, in the sense of conforming his temporal existence to the radically unfamiliar, then psychology describes the various temporal (natural) states of man that correspond to his growing inability to understand himself in natural categories, and his developing response to the demand which he acknowledges that this makes for his living within his 'eternal qualification', that is, for the possibility of his genuinely possessing that qualification.[53]

The problem with MacIntyre's natural theology is that it obscures the difference between the hypothetical imperative and what he thinks of as its biblical equivalent. The central issue on which Kierkegaard differs from MacIntyre is that the latter thinks of ethics in terms of the contrast between sin and virtue, whereas according to the Christian definition the opposite of sin is faith (SD 82, 131). For Kierkegaard this means that the truly ethical cannot be construed by philosophy at all, for neither sin nor faith can be accommodated in the universal categories of reason. And since the truth of revelation is the standard both of itself and of the false,

reason cannot judge revelation, it can only be judged by it. As Steven Emmanuel points out, repentance, the climax and downfall of the ethical, is "the act of giving up our claims about the superiority of reason."[54] It does not follow, however, that Christianity is irrational, "For what the absolute paradox reveals is a basic tension within the concept of rationality itself: the conflict between pure and practical reason."[55] Insofar as Kierkegaard perpetuates the Kantian dichotomy between theoretical and practical reason, MacIntyre is right to see a kinship between their philosophies (AV 47). Unlike Kant, however, Kierkegaard aligns this dichotomy with the Pauline conflict between the wisdom of the Greeks and Christianity.

It is easy enough to distinguish the kind of theology that belongs to religiousness A from that which is only possible in B, for "[r]eligiousness A can exist in paganism, and in Christianity it can be the religiousness of everyone who is not decisively Christian, whether he be baptized or no." (CUP 495) The distinction between natural and revealed theology was already well established by the time of Aquinas, and further reinforced by his assimilation of the works of Aristotle. In the words of St. Thomas himself:

> Theology is twofold: *one* in which divine things are considered not so much as the subject of the science but as the principles of its subject, and such is that theology which the philosophers sought after and which by another name is called "metaphysics", the *other* which considers divine things on their own account as the very subject of its science, and this is that theology which is communicated in Holy Scripture.[56]

It would be a mistake, however, to simply to identify religiousness A with metaphysics, for the latter is an abstraction rather than an existential possibility. But on the basis of the dual definition of theology given above, the diremption of the sphere of religion which occurs in the Kierkegaardian text can be interpreted as the expression of a certain stage in the breakdown of the traditional synthesis of Christianity and pagan philosophy. In order to show how this affects MacIntyre's attempt to reconstitute that synthesis, it will be useful to correlate Kierkegaard's typology with some of the configurations to be found in the texts of the thinkers cited by Derrida in the passage that I quoted at the outset of Chapter 1. My attempt to construct a Kierkegaardian alternative to MacIntyre's version of events will receive a considerable boost if it turns out to be compatible with the post-metaphysical projects of Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Levinas. With this in view, Chapter 3 will begin with a survey of Marion's phenomenology of the Idol and the Icon. This will be followed by discussion of recollection and repetition, after which I will take a closer look at Levinas' account of the Saying and the Said. What these conceptual pairings have in common is that they each combine one term which contains the whole of the Platonic hierarchy and one term which transcends that system. In order for MacIntyre's tripartite scheme to conform to this pattern it would have to be reconfigured along the lines of something like the 'covert economy' which Kevin Hart argues has always existed between metaphysics, mystical theology and deconstruction.[57] 'Reason', 'revelation', and 'relativism' perhaps, with 'reason' signifying the implicit theological 'grammar' of modern secular discourse, and 'relativism' referring to the

exposure and deconstruction of that theology. Revelation, meanwhile, inaugurates what Michel de Certeau calls the logic of the Gospels.

> It is the logic of "neither the one nor the other." . . . It creates, proportioned to a given term and to its juxtaposed contrary, a third hypothesis but without determining it. It opens a future but without fixing that future. It "permits" a spiritual action, but without identifying it with an objective statement, institution, or law. It makes necessary a risk, a conversion, a doing which cannot be a priori specified or said within a text.[58]

Here it is a question of neither Greek nor Jew, neither the aesthetic nor the ethical, but another kind of logic which is "the condition of possibility for a Christian language, i.e., of an actual, contemporary production proportioned to the living experiences, the risks undertaken, and the real communications among believers. Otherwise, the Christian language would be only the consequence of a past - a (perhaps beautiful) museum, a (perhaps glorious) cemetery."[59]

Notes

1 "What makes it possible for the adherents of a philosophical system to claim that it has been rationally vindicated is just that about it in respect of which it is also open to the possibility of rational defeat. Hence, it is one of the essential virtues for a major philosophical system that it will be stated in a way that renders it maximally vulnerable to refutation from its own point of view." MacIntyre, "Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?" pp. 77-8.

2 Cf. Milbank: "It is, of course, quite simply impossible to be a Christian and to suppose . . . that the struggle of natural selection . . . is how creation *as creation* rather than thwarted creation genuinely comes about." *The Word Made Strange*, p. 229.

3 "Genealogy . . . sees itself upside down in the mirror of reactive forces. Its image then appears as that of an 'evolution'. - Sometimes this evolution is understood in the German manner, as a dialectical and Hegelian evolution, as the development of a contradiction. Sometimes it is understood in the English manner, as a utilitarian derivation, as the development of profit and interest. . . . Whether it is English or German, evolutionism, is the reactive image of genealogy." (NP 56)

4 Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, p. 224.

5 *Ibid.*

6 "You see what it was that really triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was understood ever more rigorously, the father confessor's refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price." Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, V, 357, p. 307.

7 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 173.

8 C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript*: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus*, p. 189.

9 "Humanity has had to pay dearly for this Athenian having gone to school among the Egyptians (- or among the Jews in Egypt? . . .)." (TI 114)

10 A reference to Augustine's description of pagan virtues. See *The City of God*, XIX, 25.

11 In fact this was exactly how he responded to someone who raised this question at the end of his 1997 John Coffin Memorial Lecture: "What has Christianity to Say to the Moral Philosopher?" at the University of London on May 21st. 1998.

12 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 2.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

14 *Ibid.*

15 C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, p. 102.

16 Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, p. 219.

17 "Do you realize that what you are bringing up is the trick argument that a man cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know? He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no

need of the enquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for." *Meno*, 80 e; *Platonis opera*, IX, pp. 222-23.
18 Michael Weston, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy: An Introduction*, p. 160.
19 "The chain of derivations which is constructed in deliberation is also a chain of 'for the sake of' relationships. . . . If it is for its own sake that an immediate particular good is to be achieved, then it is always as a constitutive part of that life of the good and the best which is the *telos* for human beings. So that only the supreme good is valued *only* for itself." (WJ 131)
20 See Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, 21 b-23 a; Bekker I, pp. 21-23, *Works*, I.
21 Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, p. 549.
22 Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, p. 13.
23 Nietzsche's expression for the universal laws of reason and nature: "Our whole attitude toward nature, the way we violate her with the aid of machines and the heedless inventiveness of our technicians and engineers, is *hubris*; our attitude toward God as some alleged spider of purpose and morality behind the great captious web of causality, is *hubris* . . . " (GM III, 9: 113)
24 See C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, p. 221.
25 Michael Weston, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy*, p. 145.
26 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 407.
27 Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, p. 205.
28 John Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay in Overcoming Metaphysics*, p. 200.
29 Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *A Postmodern Reader*, eds. Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon., p. 226.
30 Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Levinas and Derrida*, p. 30.
31 Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*, p. 182.
32 Quoted by Derrida in "How to Avoid Speaking," in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward, p. 182.
33 Derrida, *ibid.*, p. 184.
34 Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *ibid.*, p. 227.
35 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 292.
36 Derrida, *ibid.*, p. 293.
37 Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, pp. 103-4.
38 Hart, *ibid.*, p. 8.
39 Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, p. 441.
40 "Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word 'God' is to signify." Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism* in *Basic Writings*, p. 253
41 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 302.
42 Graham Ward, *The Postmodern God*, p. xli.
43 *Ibid*, p. xlii.
44 C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, p. 140.
45 Evans, *ibid.*, p. 26.
46 Heidegger, *What is Metaphysics?* in *Basic Writings*, p. 103.
47 *Ibid.*, p. 109.
48 See Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, in *Basic Writings*, pp. 307-41.
49 From Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, reprinted in *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, ed. L. Cahoone, p. 411.
50 John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, p. 221.
51 *Ibid.*, p. 229.
52 Evans, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, p. 69.
53 Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 159-60.
54 Stephen Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation*, p. 59.
55 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
56 From Aquinas' commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate*, quoted by Kevin Hart in *The Trespass of the Sign*, p. 81.
57 Hart, *ibid.*, p. ix.
58 Michel de Certeau, *How is Christianity Thinkable Today?* in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward, p. 154.
59 *Ibid.*, p. 155.

3. THE ETHICAL CRITIQUE OF ONTOLOGY

Given the scope of his enquiry, Kierkegaard could hardly avoid restating in his own terms some central Thomistic themes, but apparently he showed no inclination at all to follow up any of the references to Aquinas that he came across in his studies.

> Just the thought of 15,000 arguments . . . must have made Kierkegaard recoil in horror. No doubt Kierkegaard would have agreed heartily with St. Thomas' own final judgement of his work. . . . "All that I have written seems to me like straw compared with what has now been revealed to me."[1]

This famous utterance followed some sort of 'mystical experience' suffered by St. Thomas after saying Mass on December 6th. 1273. It is taken by Caputo to reveal the 'animating nerve' beneath the scaffolding of his Scholastic metaphysics, thus providing a key to its retrieval from Heidegger's 'destruction' of onto-theology. "St. Thomas' metaphysics is not the opposite of his mystical life, but a concealed, discursive, representational - one is tempted to say 'alienated' - way of expressing it."[2] Heidegger depicts the history of the West as a series of epochs whose world-views are shaped by the various ways in which Being is sent to thinking, an interpretation which provides the background for Marion's account of the Idol as the 'God' of immanent religiousness. "To each epoch corresponds a figure of the divine that is fixed, each time, in an idol." (GB 28) Aquinas was not the first to introduce God into metaphysics as the ground of beings, but Marion claims that it was he who "inverted the primacy of goodness over Being that Denys acknowledged in his treatise on the *Divine Names*." (GB 81) Caputo credits him with having exhausted the possibilities of thinking Christianity in terms of Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics.

> But his genius was decidedly not to bring this tradition as a whole into question, to question the terms which were handed down to him, to wonder about the sending of Being in the Roman-Latin language he spoke as a *magister*, to wonder whence these terms and categories, this language, this whole metaphysical constellation sprang.[3]

Aquinas stands squarely in the middle of the tradition of western philosophy, at the high-tide of Christendom, when its task was to incorporate the conceptual resources made available by the newly-translated works of Aristotle. He could not possibly have envisaged the complacency of the scientifically-educated bourgeoisie of 19th. century Copenhagen: "Thomas thought that he lived in a society of Christians, who needed to know more in order to be better Christians. . . . Kierkegaard saw himself living in a society of pagans who were convinced, if they ever thought about it at all, that they were Christians."[4] Still less could he have foreseen the *Gestell* which Heidegger depicts as the end-result of that tradition.[5] It is the emergence of historical consciousness that makes possible the 'step back' from metaphysics and the attempt to think the sending itself, whether as primal donation, the saying of the said, or the opening of

the ontological difference between Being and beings which shapes the conceptual idols of any given age.

3.1 The Icon and the Idol

According to Marion, as a mode of apprehending divinity, an idol is never merely an illusion, but rather the reflection from an 'invisible mirror' of a human gaze which has ceased to transpierce what it encounters and fixed on a 'first visible', the 'low-water mark of the divine' (GB 9-15). "What renders the idol problematic does not stem from a failure . . . but, on the contrary, from the conditions of its validity - its radical immanence to the one who experiences it, and experiences it, rightly so, as impassable." (GB 28) For Marion, the 'genuineness' of the idol means that the death of 'God', the lingering death of Christendom, deserves to be taken seriously. But no brand of atheism is worth more than the concept of God which it refutes. "In the end Kant and Nietzsche equally admit the equivalence of God with 'the moral God', so that the same idolatry affects the thinker of the categorical imperative as much as the thinker of the 'death of God'." (GB 32) In order to display even the appearance of rigor, the logic of refutation must produce an exhaustive definition which is possible and, at the same time, demonstrably impossible. "This double and contradictory demand is comprehensible only if one distinguishes, within the definition of God thus employed, an idol: namely a representation of God at once inadequate (objectively) and impassable (subjectively)" (GB 55) If the various forms of idolatry exposed by such thinkers as Freud, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger can all be said to fall within the scope of the religiousness of immanence, the same is true of the gods which rush to fill the vacuum left by their demise. This is why, as Marion says, "[t]he true question concerning Nietzsche does not concern his so-called (and vulgar) atheism; it asks if the liberation of the divine, which it attempts, accedes to a true liberation or fails along the way." (GB 32) As we shall see, the same question arises with respect to Heidegger's philosophical atheism.

As I see it, what renders the idol problematic is the fact that it is governed by the immanental logic exemplified in Feuerbach's theory of projection, in which each pole, human or divine, is magnified at the expense of the other. If we accept Marion's account of the invisible mirror, then all idolatry must be self-idolatry, so that deicide is really suicide, and the autonomous subject in a godless world is sawing off the branch on which it sits. Thus the realm of the idol is struck with paradox, for although, as Nietzsche saw, the seemingly unstoppable progress of the will to truth is in key part made possible and sanctioned by Christianity, according to the dynamic of Heidegger's *Gestell*, the more control we exercise (by investing in bio-technology,[6] cybernetics[7] and the like), the more the whole exercise seems to be getting out of control.

> As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as an object, but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of standing-reserve, then he comes to . . . the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile, man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself and postures as lord of the earth.[8]

The see-saw dialectic of immanence is played out between the hierarchical oppositions of Platonism which constitute the terms of Derrida's account of the rival 'interpretations of interpretation' made possible by the structural ambiguity of the sign. While MacIntyre is a descendant of Plato and the Eleatics, both Nietzsche and Heidegger are proud to own their allegiance to Heraclitus. As we saw in Chapter 2, each side in this conflict seeks to cancel the difference between them by abolishing (translating, sublating, inverting or whatever) the other, in accordance with the logic of the idol. Kierkegaard, however, differs from them both in that he insists on keeping both terms in play. In terms of the philosophical options familiar to Climacus, this dichotomy is represented by, on the one hand, the spurious God's-eye view of Hegelian idealism, which cannot focus on the singularity of the individual, and on the other hand, the more 'realistic' if blinkered approach of empiricism, which has difficulty rising above the realm of particulars. But "[w]hether truth is defined more empirically, as the conformity of thought and being, or more idealistically, as the conformity of being with thought, it is, in either case, important carefully to note what is meant by being." (CUP 169)

Like Aquinas - the gulf between them is irrelevant here - Heidegger fixes his gaze on the horizon of Being, which is accorded a privileged site in Dasein as the being for whom Being (its own and that of other beings) is a question of fundamental concern. Being is always the aim of a gaze, determined by an essential orientation in the nature of Dasein. For Kierkegaard, however, thinking only coincides with being in the abstract medium of metaphysical speculation, whereas the concrete realm of existing and becoming is always characterised by the gap between thought and act, possibility and realization. Since philosophy is essentially retrospective it always arrives too late, which is why the construction of logical connections between abstract concepts 'seems like straw' in contrast to an imperative which does not wait for someone to complete the 'system'. If philosophy starts from the side of empirical beings, being can only be thought as becoming, while "truth becomes an approximation whose beginning cannot be posited absolutely, precisely because the conclusion is lacking, the effect of which is retroactive." (CUP 169) If it starts from the side of Being, the correspondence of thinking and being becomes an empty tautology, an abstract self-identity: truth *is*. "Abstract thought may continue as long as it likes to rewrite this thought in varying phraseology, it will never get any further." (CUP 170) Thus, contra MacIntyre, there can be no question of progress in philosophy, rather it is always a question of recollection, of trying to return to its *archê* or origin. As Heidegger puts it: "[w]hen philosophy attends to its essence it does not make forward strides at all. It remains where it is in order to constantly think the Same."[9] Nor can there be any question of choosing between one system or another.

> Not only do we lack any criterion that would permit us to evaluate the perfection of an epoch of metaphysics as compared with any other epoch; the right to this kind of evaluation does not exist. Plato's thinking is no more perfect than Parmenides'. Hegel's philosophy is no more perfect than Kant's. Each epoch of philosophy has its own necessity. . . . It is not for us to prefer one to the other, as can be the case with various *Weltanschauungen*.[10]

Against both Heidegger and Aquinas, Marion argues that the concept of Being cannot contain the excessiveness of that which grants Being/beings, whether conceived in terms of *esse/ens* or in terms of the withdrawal of Being (ontological difference) which allows beings to come forth. Just as the gaze of Dasein, frozen on the screen of Being - for how could we value that which has no being? - is really a projection reflected back from an invisible mirror, positing the *ens* as the object of the intellect presupposes the anteriority of human understanding: "In fact, St. Thomas does not hesitate to establish the primacy of the *ens* by the primacy of a point of view that limits one's view to the measurements of the *ens* . . . only a certain taking-into-view permits plotting the position of the *ens*, making the *ens* a solid point." (GB 79). From the perspective of the end of philosophy, even if it is still only the beginning of the end, the solidification of the concept of God as the ground of beings can be seen as a key development in the course of events leading up to the epoch of the twilight of the idols.

The Icon, on the other hand, is more like a window than a mirror; it is not the product of a gaze but the saturation of the field of the visible by a gaze from elsewhere. "The icon regards us - it *concerns* us, in that it allows the intention of the invisible to occur visibly." (GB 19) Short-circuiting the mechanism of projection, it summons our gaze into the infinite depths behind the eyes of every face, insofar as that face is not masked by the radiance of a mirror. "In the idol, the gaze of man is frozen in its mirror; in the icon, the gaze of man is lost in the invisible gaze that visibly envisages him." (GB 20) All talk of it should be regulated by what Marion calls the Pauline 'formula' (Col. 1:15) of Christ as the icon of the invisible God (GB 17), present in the gift of the eucharist which sustains the body of the church. As in Climacus' account of the function of reason (to distinguish the paradox from nonsense) the icon "can proceed conceptually, provided at least that the concept renounce comprehending the incomprehensible." (GB 22) The way in which it gives itself to thinking is the opposite of the mechanism of projection. "Valid as the icon is the concept or group of concepts that reinforces the distinction of the visible and the invisible as well as their union, hence that increases the one all the more that it highlights the other." (GB 23) This precisely mirrors the structure of the paradox which presides over religiousness B, as "the implicit consequence of the doctrine of the Atonement." (SD 100)

> Speculation, which talks itself out of the paradoxes, snips a little bit from both sides and thereby gets along more easily - it does not make sin quite so positive - but nevertheless cannot get it through its head that sin is to be completely forgotten. But Christianity, which was the first to discover the paradoxes, is as paradoxical on this point as possible; it seems to be working against itself by establishing sin so securely that now it seems to be utterly

> impossible to eliminate it again - and then it is this very Christianity that by means of the atonement wants to eliminate sin as completely as if it were drowned in the sea. (SD 100)

The same kind of logic informs the paradoxical relation between divine grace and human freedom, which co-inhere in a direct proportion rather than an inverse ratio.

At first sight, like the difference between religiousness A and religiousness B, the difference between the idol and the icon seems to correspond to Heidegger's distinction between the 'God of metaphysics' and 'the more divine God' of Christian faith, a model which completes the divorce of the Thomist synthesis. "Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this God. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees nor can he play music and dance before this god."[11] As Marion points out, however, in the passage in the *Letter on Humanism* where Heidegger responds to those who have accused him of nihilism and atheism, he lays down a definite series of conditions for the apprehension of divinity:

> "Through the ontological interpretation of Dasein as being-in-the-world no decision . . . is made concerning a possible being toward God. It is however the case that through an illumination of transcendence we first achieve an *adequate concept of Dasein*, with respect to which it can now be asked how the relationship of Dasein to God is ontologically ordered." [quoted from his own essay "On the Essence of Ground"] . . . Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word "God" is to signify.[12]

With Heidegger, the western tradition seems to have come full circle back to the Pauline text (1 Cor. 1: 18-24) in which the 'wisdom of God' is contrasted with the wisdom sought by the Greeks, so that each looks like 'foolishness' in the eyes of the other. "Foolishness indicates that the two logics act irreducibly, in solitudes that no mediation can open; or rather, since it depends notably on Being, logic does not cover the field of revelation that the Johannine *Logos* opens to faith." (GB 63) But Heidegger approaches this gulf from the opposite direction to St. Paul, the direction of a thinking which must remain rigorously atheistic in that every question, including the question of God, yields precedence to the question of Being. "But such a suspension - phenomenologically inevitable - implies an instance anterior to 'God', hence that point from which idolatry could dawn." (GB 42-3) Thus the 'step back from metaphysics' does not suffice to make the transition from idol to icon, but opens a new chapter in the history of speculation, a 'second idolatry', in which a life devoted to thinking the question of Being is itself an 'inauthentic' mode of existence. And when Heidegger raises the question of 'a more divine god',[13] this "does not invalidate but confirms this idolatry; for what 'God' thus allows that an aim should decide his lesser or greater divinity, if not that 'God' which results from a gaze that is both pious and blasphemous?" (GB 44).

Heidegger's distinction between 'thinking' and philosophy as alternative ways of revealing is in part a conscious development of Nietzsche's discordance of art and truth.[14] Philosophy belongs to the *technê*, or way of revealing, of *epistêmê* and *mathêsis*, the 'mathematical projection' responsible for the *Gestell*. It is overcome by 'thinking', which

requires a retrieval of the *technê* of *poiêsis*, the course of which was blocked at the dawn of the tradition by the *technê* of calculative reason and diverted into the cultural category of aesthetics.[15] Not only does this function as a secularized version of the Fall, it also happens to be the original prototype of the kind of scientific paradigm-shift which MacIntyre habitually uses to illustrate the progress of rational enquiry. Just as Nietzsche's critique of Christianity agrees with Kierkegaard's views on 'Christendom' and the limitations of the ethical, so Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelian polemic feeds directly into Heidegger's critique of the whole tradition. In Kierkegaardian terms, within the dialectic of immanence the aesthetic-metaphysical is the antithesis of the ethico-religious, so that Heidegger's 'God of metaphysics' and Nietzsche's 'God of morality' are two sides of the same coin. In both cases truth and morality are criticized in the name of art, but this amounts to a confusion of the spheres in which the aesthetic is expected to accomplish what is only possible for religion. Heidegger is quite explicit on this point:

> With respect to . . . the 'Letter on Humanism,' what is being discussed there is the God of the poet, not the revealed God. There is mentioned merely what philosophical thinking is capable of on its own. Whether this may also be of significance for theology cannot be said because there is for us no third case by which it could be decided. (GB 52)[16]

The task "reserved for thinking at the end of philosophy"[17] can therefore be seen to belong, like philosophy itself, to the immanental way of recollection, which perpetuates the reign of the idol. For as Heidegger tells us himself:

> Memory, Mother of the Muses - the thinking back to what is to be thought - is the source and ground of poesy. This is why poesy is the water that at times flows backward towards the source, toward thinking as a thinking back, a recollection. . . . Poetry wells up only from devoted thought thinking back, recollecting.[18]

I cannot think of anyone who is better placed to comment on the relationship between poetry, speculation and Christianity than Anti-Climacus, who regards himself as a 'religious poet' (SD 77), but who is ranked by Kierkegaard as "a Christian on an extraordinarily high level," (SD xxii) far higher than himself. This is his verdict on the subject of what Heidegger calls 'thinking':

> Christianity teaches that everything essentially Christian depends solely upon faith; therefore it wants to be precisely a Socratic, God-fearing ignorance, which by means of ignorance guards faith against speculation, keeping watch so that the gulf of qualitative difference between God and man may be maintained as it is in the paradox and faith, so that God and man do not, even more dreadfully than ever in paganism, do not merge in some way, *philosophice*, *poetice*, etc., into one - in the system. (SD 99)

This does not mean, however, that Heidegger's turn to poetry is any less acceptable than MacIntyre's attempt to establish the superiority of rational excellence to rhetorical effectiveness, for what the Nietzschean dialectic of art and truth does suggest is the possibility

that rhetorical arguments are at least as valid as rational ones, a point I will return to in Chapter 4.

In order to think God outside the determination of ontological difference Marion turns to the formula proposed by St. John: "God [is] *agape*" (1 John 4:8) (GB 47). The peculiarity of love is that it is reinforced by the absence of conditions. "Thus, even the inevitable impotence of man to correspond to the destiny that love gratuitously imposes upon him is not enough to disqualify its initiative or its accomplishment." (GB 47-8) In keeping with the logic of the icon, this formula combines both the distinction and the union of the human and the divine:

> God can give himself to be thought without idolatry only starting from himself alone; to give himself to be thought as love, hence as gift . . . as a gift that gives itself to be thought. But a gift, which gives itself forever, can only be thought by a thought that gives itself to the gift to be thought. Only a thought that gives itself can devote itself to a gift for thought. But, for thought, what is it to give itself, if not love? (GB 49)

The same logic organizes Kierkegaard's account of the passion of the understanding, which provides the momentum needed for the transition to a higher sphere of existence. "Purity of heart is to will one thing" - a dictum that meets with MacIntyre's approval (WJ 165) - means "that the person who would will one thing can only will 'the good' which is eternal."[19] In the collision with the unknown, however, the absolutely other, the initiative must come from the direction of the icon. No direct access is possible, for "our gaze alone cannot pretend to the icon except by deceiving itself again, since in no way does it depend on our gaze that a face envisages it, that it is envisaged by the distance that *agape* dispenses and traverses." (GB 110-1) Without this initiative, the most that we can do is adopt an attitude which refuses to be dazzled by its reflection in any first or last visible, a gaze which finds itself "suspended between the still falling twilight of the last idols and the ever-deferred dawn of an icon." (GB 114) Just as Heidegger avails himself of Kierkegaard's phenomenology of 'the nothing' as the object of anxiety in order to re-awaken the wonder which prompted the founding question of metaphysics: "Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?"[20] so Marion extends Heidegger's analysis of the nothing at the heart of profound boredom[21] in order to show that beings as a whole are struck with vanity. "The world leaks vanity through all its beings." (GB 134) Only a gaze of infinite boredom which refuses to come to rest on any spectacle whatever is capable of transpiercing the screen of Being. Contrary to MacIntyre's assertion that phenomenology is unable "to discern anything wrong," (AV 2) such a gaze "always notes a fringe of free light between the visible spectacle and the horizon which is always still open . . . the horizon always feels like an indraft [*appel d'air*] that, come from elsewhere, appeals against the threatening idolatry of the visible, and, in a puff of wind, arouses the aim toward a new visible, infinitely." (GB 111)[22] This gaze has lost all interest in *what is*; it has even become indifferent to the difference between being and nonbeing, presence and absence, and

yet this is no feat of ascetic virtuosity, but "a situation that is both possible and actual every day: our own." (GB 114)

It might seem that such an extreme indifference is the antithesis of Kierkegaardian passion, and so it is. The same principle is at work as in the paradoxical passion of the intellect and the analogy of erotic love, wherein self-love wills its own downfall in the encounter with the other (PF 39).

> If my mind merits becoming an unimpeachable center, it has this privilege because of its irrepressible acuteness that detests the world; but how could the principle of such a dazzling disaster itself become that which it renders impossible? As much as self-idolatry seemed to be the rule of the idolatrous gaze, so it appears from now on untenable to a gaze defined by its power to transpierce every idol. Thus the alternative no longer consists in deciding between an external idol and self-idolatry, but between the icon par excellence and self-hate. (GB 113)

This is the choice with which the paradox confronts us: faith or offence. The difference between the realm of the idol and the world envisaged by the icon is the dimension of transcendence, which constitutes the world as creation rather than "the arrogant closure of the world on itself [which] closes to it access not only to distance but to the very suspicion of its own vanity." (GB 131) The site between the idol and the icon, between the sending of Being and divine charity, "is called melancholy." (GB 132), Like Kierkegaardian despair, it strikes all that is with vanity. In the absence of love, everything is vanity. "Hence one understands that vanity may also agree with idolatry: one and the other in fact admit an identical contrary, God as *agape*." (GB 135)

Gillian Rose calls attention to the way in which the contrast between *eros* and *agape* corresponds to Kierkegaard's distinction between religiousness A and B, remarking that "in existential terms, Agape is the paradox, while Eros is within the realm of aesthetic representation."[23] She goes on to provide a useful summary of their differences:

> First, the 'Eros-system' is *demonstrational* . . . the 'Agape-system' is *revelational* . . . Second, Eros stresses '*works*' or human achievement, symbolized by the soul's ascent of the heavenly ladder; while Agape stresses *faith*, . . . It is not a question of working one's way up but of something offered which comes down. Third, '*Eros starts with the assumption of the Divine origin and worth of the soul; Agape . . . starts with the conviction of one's own lack of worth.*' Fourth, Eros presupposes ethical and metaphysical dualism of Spirit (good) and Matter (evil) - the soul imprisoned in the body and seeking release from bondage by other-worldly asceticism; while Agape conceives the opposition between good and evil exclusively in terms of the will and its perversion. . . . Conversion does not mean transference of desire from a lower to a higher object, it means a transforming of selfish will to theocentric will. Fifth, Eros is converted by the beauty of the divine, by aesthetic vision; Agape cannot see God and live. Sixth, for Eros the soul is *immortal*, and, when purified from sense, will return to its Divine origin; Agape stresses the *resurrection* of the dead, body and soul, not derivable from any natural endowment of humanity but dependent on an act of God . . . Finally, but perhaps most important of all, 'Agape is the initiator of fellowship with God'. This means that the command to love the neighbour is derived from God's love for man. It does not indicate man's way to God by loving the neighbour . . . but fellowship within God's love, within God's way to man.[24]

This final point sheds light on what Johannes de silentio calls the 'teleological suspension of the ethical', in which the God-relationship elevates the individual above the universal, converting the ethical from an impossible ideality into a divine possibility. The contrast made in the previous point between the Platonic and the Christian conceptions of immortality illuminates the crucial distinction between the categories of recollection and repetition.

> The speculative principle is that I arrive at the eternal retrogressively through recollection, and that the eternal individual is in this manner directly related to the eternal. But an existing individual can have a relationship to the eternal only as something prospective, as something in the future. (CUP 380)

Hopefully, enough has now been said for the following account of these Kierkegaardian motifs to be read against the background of what has been developed here.

3. 2 Repetition and Recollection

If, as Nietzsche thought, the highest question of philosophy is the question of whether existence has a meaning (NP 18), that question has always been articulated within the binary framework of Plato's problem of participation. This is what constitutes the history of philosophy as a tradition of enquiry, in which the Kierkegaardian paradox still bears the hallmark of its Platonic origin. As Derrida says: "The concept of sense, of meaning, is governed by the entire system of determinations that we are pointing out here, and every time that a question of *meaning* is posed, it must be posed within the closure of metaphysics." (MP 51) Hegel poses the question of meaning in terms of the dilemma of the 'unhappy consciousness', which, unable to reconcile its finitude and mutability with the infinite and immutable essence of consciousness as such, compensates for this incapacity by projecting a transcendental God invested with the power to bring about the desired resolution[25] - an evolutionary stage to be overcome by Hegelian philosophy. Kierkegaard never questions the Platonic framework of Hegel's account of alienation, but denies that a synthesis between ideality and reality can be achieved by reason alone, let alone Reason writ large as a pantheistic abstraction, for reason is itself one of the poles of the contradiction. Hegelian speculation requires an abrogation of the concrete circumstances of the philosopher's existence that renders it both comical and pathetic.

> A thinker erects a huge building . . . a system embracing the whole of existence, world history, etc., and if his personal life is considered, to our amazement the appalling and ludicrous discovery is made that he himself does not personally live in this huge, domed palace but in a shed alongside it, or in a doghouse, or at best in the janitor's quarters. (SD 43-4)

Kierkegaard's approach to the problem of participation, and perhaps his most important and original contribution to the tradition of enquiry it has engendered, involves the

appropriation and radicalization of the concept of repetition (*anapalin*),[26] which Aristotle categorized as the means by which an individual comes to acquire the virtues:

> Repetition is the new category which has to be brought to light. If one knows something of modern philosophy and is not entirely ignorant of the Greek, one will easily perceive that precisely this category explains the relation between the Eleatic School and Heraclitus, and properly it is repetition which by mistake has been called mediation. (R 33)

In contrast to the natural faculties of the senses, virtuous dispositions, like anything else that must be learned, can only be acquired by means of repeated exercise (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II, i). It requires the repeated effort of constant discipline to make the 'Eleatic' ideality of ethics stick to 'Heraclitean' flux of everyday reality. But, as Stack suggests,[27] for Kierkegaard, every occasion of significant choice seems to involve a renewal of the decision for the ethical as a whole. And if one is sufficiently awake, each moment provides such an occasion. Existence is a process of becoming; therefore, as long as one is still alive, the task of 'becoming subjective' can never be completed once and for all. This is why Climacus counsels against embarking on 'universal history', for death may intervene at any moment.

> If death is always uncertain, if I am a mortal creature, then it is impossible to understand this uncertainty in terms of a mere generality unless indeed I, too, happen to be merely a human being in general. . . . And if initially my human nature is merely an abstract something, it is at any rate the task which life sets me to become subjective; and in the same degree that I become subjective, the uncertainty of death comes more and more to interpenetrate my subjectivity dialectically. It thus becomes more and more important for me to think it in connection with every factor and phase of my life; for since the uncertainty is there in every moment, it can be overcome only by overcoming it in every moment. (CUP 149)

This conscious living toward death as the source of responsibility is one of the meanings of what Derrida calls 'the gift of death'. Insofar as no one can die in my place, one can say that my individuality is conferred by death. "It is from the site of death as the place of my irreplaceability, that is, of my singularity, that I feel called to responsibility. In this sense only a mortal can be responsible." (GD 41) In Patočka's analysis, the passage from Platonism to Christianity involves a conversion with regard to the experience of death. Eternal life is now received as a gift rather than an assured possession, a change which involves a reversal in the relation between time and eternity. In the 'algebraic' idiom of Vigilius Haufniensis: "[f]or the Greeks, the eternal lies behind as the past that can only be entered backwards." But in the Christian category of repetition, "eternity is entered forwards." (CA 90)

Overcoming death in every moment leads Kierkegaard to place what MacIntyre takes to be an undue emphasis on "criterionless fundamental choice" (AV 49), a concept which provides the starting-point for his attempt in *After Virtue* to reverse the catastrophic effects of the Enlightenment. As I hope to show, however, Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel can be brought to bear on MacIntyre's account of rational decision-making, not only in the case of the transition to the ethical which is the specific focus of his criticism, but above all with respect to the leap of faith, which takes one beyond the immanent rationality of traditions of enquiry. The

full significance of repetition only comes into view in the region beyond ethical self-sufficiency, where humanistic rationality is suspended. So exorbitant is the infinite requirement of the ethical that "[e]ither all of existence comes to an end in the demand of ethics, or the condition [faith] is provided and the whole of life and existence begins anew, not through an immanent continuity with the former existence, but through a transcendence." (CA 17)

In order to make sense of the confusion of temporal existence it must be given something of the continuity of the eternal. For Kierkegaard, there are only two ways in which this can be done. "When one does not possess the categories of recollection or of repetition the whole of life is resolved into a void and empty noise." (R 34) While the Platonic way of recollection attempts to undo the fall into time and retract the many into one by negating the world of appearances, repetition affirms temporality as the sphere of freedom and responsibility. The Hegelian category of mediation does not provide a genuine third alternative but is a fraudulent attempt to make things easy by turning Platonism on its side and fusing time, freedom and contingency with the eternal categories of logic and necessity. "To prevent this questionable consequence, or this ambiguous agreement between logic and freedom, I thought that in the sphere of freedom one might use repetition." (R xxx) By importing the category of transition into logic, the System puts on a show of movement which makes the passage from possibility to actuality look effortless, thus obscuring the genuine open-endedness of either/or decisions and the 'transcendency' ascribed by Kierkegaard to the Aristotelian concept of *kinesis*, or freely directed movement (R 34, CUP 306).

> In the sphere of logic transition is mute, in the sphere of freedom it *becomes*. So when possibility in logic qualifies itself as actuality it merely disturbs the hushed reticence of the logical process by talking about motion and transition. In the sphere of freedom, on the other hand, there is possibility, and actuality emerges as a transcendency. (R xxxi)

Any movement that "modern philosophy" does succeed in making "is always within immanence, whereas repetition is always a transcendence." (R 94)

The transition in question is what MacIntyre calls the progress from "human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be" to "human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*" (AV 53). For Kierkegaard, it is the process of becoming a self, which involves exchanging one's initial dependency on the aesthetic determinants of good or bad fortune for a life of ethical resolution, in other words the choice of choice itself. This is a notion which MacIntyre seems to find unintelligible, preferring to enframe the task of life within the hypothetical imperative,[28] as a practical syllogism whose outcome is ethical activity. The supreme advantage of Aristotle's account of practical reason is that it leaves no room for hesitation between the conclusion of a practical syllogism and its execution (AV 161); the action *is* the conclusion. But this is precisely the feature of pagan philosophy that provides the opening for Anti-Climacus' critique of Platonic-Hegelian speculation, although he does not mention Aristotle in this connection.

> In pure ideality, where the actual individual person is not involved . . . there is no difficulty at all connected with the transition from understanding to doing. This is the Greek mind (but not the Socratic, for Socrates was too much of an ethicist for that). (SD 93)

The same kind of logic underwrites the foundational proposition of modern philosophy: *cogito ergo sum* (to think is to be). "Thus it is evident that modern philosophy is neither more nor less than paganism." (SD 93) In itself this would not be too bad, but the trouble is that "modern philosophy . . . wants to delude us into thinking that this is Christianity." (SD 93) It does this by collapsing the distinction between the hypothetical and categorical imperatives, and conflating the practical syllogism of humanistic reasoning with the 'thou shalt' of divine commandment.

For MacIntyre, the essential defect in the practical reasoning of modern liberalism consists in the insertion of an indefinite gap between calculation and action, which allows the resulting openness to an unlimited range of alternative preferences to be seen as a characteristic of practical reasoning as such (WJ 340-1). But without this interval between thinking and doing there would be no foothold for sin, which - once the revelation of sin has been received - is always qualified by consciousness. "In this transition Christianity begins; by taking this path it shows that sin is rooted in willing and arrives at the concept of defiance, and then, to fasten the end very firmly, it adds the doctrine of hereditary sin" (SD 93). What is lacking, both in Aristotle's account of practical reason and in the Socratic equation of sin with ignorance (SD 87), is the concept of wilful disobedience. The Greek mentality was too naive, too playfully aesthetic "to grasp that anyone could knowingly not do the good, or knowingly, knowing what is right, do wrong." (SD 90) But the slightest delay between knowing what is right and doing it gives willing an opportunity to disagree with knowing, and willing has the power to extend the interval indefinitely while knowing subsides into obscurity, until, in the end, knowing comes over to the side of willing and admits it was right all along.

> And this is how perhaps the great majority of men live: they work gradually at eclipsing their ethical and ethical-religious comprehension, which would lead them out into decisions that their lower nature does not much care for, but they expand their esthetic and metaphysical comprehension, which ethically is a diversion. (SD 94)

For MacIntyre, right action is the automatic outcome of a successful intellectual operation. "In the world of actuality, however, where the individual is involved, there is this tiny little transition from having understood to doing; it is not . . . *geshwind wie der Wind* [fast as the wind]. Quite the opposite, this is the beginning of a very long-winded story." (SD 93-4)

As we know, the central role in MacIntyre's account of practical reason is given to prudential reasoning (*phronêsis*, *prudentia*), the capacity to identify a particular situation as the type of circumstance in which one or more of the virtues is universally applicable. The virtues are defined as "those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimônia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement towards that *telos*."

(AV 148). An integral part of that *telos* is the exercise of the correct means, "[f]or what constitutes the good for man is a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to secure such a life." (AV 149) According to Climacus, however, a "prudent eudaemonist" may know very well that virtue is supposed to be its own reward, "he may approach very near to the good," but when it comes to the transition from possibility to actuality, prudence fails to meet the test. "The actual interval of time separates the good and its reward so long, so everlastingly, that prudence cannot bring them together, and the eudaemonist begs to be excused." (CUP 306) If, in MacIntyre's words, "for Kant one can be both good and stupid," (AV 155) for Kierkegaard 'stupidity' is a positive advantage in the sense that prudential reasoning constitutes an obstruction to the good. Caputo points out that *phronêsis* is a deeply conservative faculty "in the best sense of that word, that is, it knows how to keep something alive in changing circumstances but only within the compass of an established order."[29] It is therefore not very helpful in the context of competing paradigms. Now, bearing in mind that, for MacIntyre's purposes, Christianity, Judaism and Islam are all more or less convertible in the sense that they are essentially compatible with Platonism, the geographical setting of the *akedah* - the story which reveals the incommensurability between divine and human morality - is the Dome of the Rock, which, as Derrida reminds us in his commentary on *Fear and Trembling* (GD Ch. 3), "is just above the destroyed temple of Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall, not far from the Way of the Cross," (GD 69-70) a site disputed by all three of the religions which claim this story as their patrimony.

> These three monotheisms fight over it, it is useless to deny this in terms of some wide-eyed ecumenism; they make war with fire and blood, have always done so and all the more fiercely today, each claiming its particular perspective on this place and claiming an original historical and political interpretation of Messianism and of the sacrifice of Isaac . . . There is no front between responsibility and irresponsibility but only between different appropriations of the same sacrifice, different orders of responsibility, different other orders: the religious and the ethical, the religious and the ethico-political, the theological and the political, the theologico-political, the theocratic and the ethico-political, and so on; the secret and the public, the profane and the sacred, the specific and the generic, the human and the non-human. (GD 70)

The scope of *phronêsis* is restricted to the realm of probabilities, where it exhibits the kind of calculative shrewdness whose sediment we find deposited in proverbs, "which are nothing more than the rules of prudence" (SD 34). As such, they are a repository of worldly commonsense, much preoccupied with avoiding the risk of loss. "For example: we say that one regrets ten times for having spoken to once for having kept silent," (SD 34) because self-disclosure can involve one in difficulties. But to keep silent is more dangerous still, for in seeking to evade the consequences of speaking we forfeit the possibility of correction by the verdict of actuality.

> The world considers it dangerous to venture . . . And yet, precisely by not venturing it is so terribly easy to lose what it would be very hard to lose, however much one lost by risking, and in any case never this way, so easily, so completely, as if it were nothing at all - namely, oneself. (SD 34)

The ethical makes an unconditional demand for disclosure. As long as an individual lives only in the psychic and sensate categories of aesthetic immediacy she remains concealed both from herself and from others. "So his ethical task is to unwrap himself from this concealment and become disclosed in the universal." (FT 109) As Derrida comments, "[f]or common sense, just as for philosophical reasoning, the most widely shared belief is that responsibility is tied to the public and to the nonsecret, to the possibility and even the necessity of accounting for one's words and actions in front of others, of justifying and owning up to them." (GD 60) There are no legitimate secrets for moral philosophy; it tolerates "no justified hiddenness, no justified incommensurability." (FT 109) But where does this leave Abraham, who cannot justify his action even to himself? Abraham cannot speak out, for in terms of the generality of ethics what he is about to commit is infanticide. Admittedly, Abraham is the exception; his ordeal is a religious trial in which the ethical itself has become the temptation. But the point is that everyone is the exception, for unless we are all to be judged *en masse* like cattle or a shoal of fish (CUP 309), sin must always be the sin of a single individual and never of humanity as a whole.

> To the extent that, in not saying the essential thing, namely, the secret between God and him, Abraham doesn't speak, he assumes the responsibility that consists in always being alone, entrenched in one's own singularity at the moment of decision. Just as no one can die in my place, no one can make a decision, what we call a 'decision', in my place. But as soon as one speaks, as soon as one enters the medium of language, one loses that very singularity. One therefore loses the possibility of deciding or the right to decide. (GD 59-60)

The exception cannot be translated into the generality of speech and ethics. Abraham can only sacrifice his son by sacrificing ethics, yet in order for it to be a genuine sacrifice, "the ethical must retain all its value; the love for his son must remain intact, and the order of human duty must continue to insist on its rights." (GD 66) The paradoxical logic of sacrificial responsibility and of 'the gift of death' is of the same order as that of martyrdom, and of the 'duty of hate' enjoined in Luke 14: 26, "'If any one comes to me and does not hate his own mother and father and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple'." (GD 64, FT 99)

Here, everything depends on maintaining the distinction between the absolute and the universal, between the God of Abraham and the *archê-telos* of the hypothetical imperative:

> The paradox of faith has lost the intermediate term, i.e. the universal. On the one hand it contains the expression of extreme egoism (doing this dreadful deed for his own sake) and on the other the expression of the most absolute devotion (doing it for God's sake). Faith itself cannot be mediated into the universal, for in that case it would be cancelled. Faith is this

> paradox, and the single individual is quite unable to make himself intelligible to anyone. (FT 99)

This unavoidable dimension of secrecy signifies an interiority which is incommensurable with the exteriority of ethical duty, an absolute responsibility which "declines the autobiography that is always auto-justification, egodicy." (GD 62) There is an almost unbearable tension between the ethical demand for disclosure and the inscrutability of God, who does not have to give reasons. Abraham's sacrifice is carried out (and God only intervenes once the decision has become irrevocable) in the name of a duty to the absolutely other, a God who "must remain transcendent, hidden, secret, jealous of the love, requests and commands that he gives, and that he asks to be kept secret." (GD 67) This is a dimension of responsibility in which "the violence that consists of asking for accounts and justifications" (GD 62) becomes an incitement "to dissolve my singularity in the medium of the concept." David Wood comments: "[r]esponsibility, then, has a power that will break through any calculated settlement of my responsibilities, and silence is a mark of this incommensurability with any specific conceptualization or finite economizing of its content."[30] So even if we grant *phronêsis* the status of a higher kind of prudence, capable of overriding the "calculating shrewdness of reason," (FT 113) its faculty of making the appropriate connection between particular and universal cannot explain Abraham, whose action must remain a scandal to any philosophy of immanence.

The example of Abraham is unique, yet its very unicity demonstrates the element of incommunicable singularity at the core of every decision.

> He decides, but his absolute decision is neither guided nor controlled by knowledge. Such, in fact, is the paradoxical condition of every decision: it cannot be deduced from a form of knowledge of which it would simply be the effect, conclusion, or explication. (GD 77)

So why does Kierkegaard insist on assigning this essentially unpredictable operation to the category of repetition? He cannot be referring to the repeatability of universal moral laws in particular circumstances since it is crucial to his position that there is a re-emergence of individuality beyond the ethical-universal:

> For faith is just this paradox, that the individual is higher than the universal, though in such a way, be it noted, that the movement is repeated, that is, having been in the universal, the single individual now sets himself apart as the particular above the universal. (FT 84)

Hannay observes that Abraham's behaviour must seem insane to anyone who does not share his "belief in the need to reconstitute the ability to serve the universal on the strength of the absurd."[31] It only makes sense if there is a court of appeal higher than that of human ethics, which can only be the case if the ethical life has its *telos* outside itself. "Unless this is how it is, faith has no place in existence; and faith is then a temptation, and Abraham is done for, since he gave in to it." (FT 98) If nothing is left over in the individual that is incommensurable with the universal, "one needs no other categories than those of the Greek philosophers, or

whatever can be deduced from them." (FT 84) But even if we can see where this is tending, and concede that Abraham was being tested, since he was already righteous the whole episode still seems monstrously gratuitous. And if Abraham's temptation was the ethical, for us it is the prospect of appealing to a legitimate suspension of the ethical that opens up terrifying possibilities. However, what the category of the religious trial has in common with the state of sin is that they are both outside the universal, and in order to be saved the sinner must, like Abraham, resort to the paradox of faith. "For when through his own guilt the individual has come out of the universal, he can only return to it on the strength of having come, as the particular, into an absolute relation to the absolute." (FT 124) Just as Isaac was restored to Abraham, repetition in the eminent sense refers to the restoration of the ethical as a task made possible by grace.

We owe Kierkegaard's most programmatic account of the role of repetition in the stages of existence to one Professor Heiberg, whose misconceived comments on *Repetition* prompted its author, Constantine Constantius, to publish an open letter which includes the following summary:

> (A) Freedom first is defined as pleasure or in pleasure. What it now fears is repetition, because it is as if repetition possessed a magic power to hold freedom captive when once it had contrived to get it under its influence. But in spite of all the inventiveness of pleasure repetition makes its appearance. Then freedom in pleasure falls into despair. The same instant freedom makes its appearance in a higher form. (B) Freedom defined as shrewdness. . . . Repetition is assumed to exist, but it is the task of freedom to see constantly a new side of repetition. This has found expression in the chapter entitled 'The Rotation of Crops' in *Either/Or*. . . . However, since freedom defined as shrewdness is only finitely characterized, repetition must again make its appearance, that is repetition of the trick by which freedom wants to delude repetition and make it something else. Then shrewdness falls into despair. (C) Now freedom breaks forth in its highest form, in which it is defined in relation to itself. Here everything is inverted, and the opposite of the first standpoint is in evidence. Now the highest interest of freedom is to bring about repetition, and it fears only lest change might have the power to alter its eternal nature. Here the problem emerges: *Is repetition possible?* (R xvi-xvii, translated from the *Papirer*, Vol. IV, pp. 280-1)

When it comes to the humanly impossible, only a 'movement of infinite resignation' can establish the requisite passivity for the task of life to be received back 'on the strength of the absurd' as a divine possibility. "The believer has the ever infallible antidote for despair - possibility - because for God everything is possible at every moment." (SD 39-40) And since the task of life can never be completed, the precarious synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, achieved at the moment when the paradox becomes a reality for faith, requires continual repetition. This kind of repetition would not be possible if the Incarnation were merely a historical event. In that case the contemporary witness would have an inestimable advantage over the follower at second-hand, but then the event could not be absolute, for the historical is always relative (PF 69). If the condition can only be received from the god himself, and not from anyone else (for then that person would become the god (PF 101)), then every generation must be contemporaneous with Christ. This means that faith, whose object is

eternal, no more depends on being close to the event than it does on the legacy, however rich, of tradition. Derrida concludes his chapter on Kierkegaard by observing that the epilogue of *Fear and Trembling* "repeats, in sentence after sentence, that this highest passion that is faith must be started over again by each generation." (GD 80)

> Each generation must begin again to involve itself in it without counting on the generation before. It thus describes the non-history of absolute beginnings which are repeated, and the very historicity that presupposes a tradition to be reinvented each step of the way, in this incessant repetition of the absolute beginning. (GD 80)

This is not to say that no class of actions displays the automatic quality which MacIntyre attributes to the outcome of the practical syllogism.

> That there are cases, particularly in connection with evil actions, where the transition from thought to action is scarcely noticeable, is not denied . . . They show what happens when the individual is in the power of a habit, that through often having made the transition from thought to action he has lost the power to keep this transition under the control of will. (CUP 304)

Habit is repetition drained of originality, which "marks precisely the eternal in earnestness, for which reason earnestness can never become a habit . . . The earnest person is earnest precisely through the originality with which he returns in repetition." (CA 149) Here, repetition signifies the performative consistency of a life of ethical resolution, which, unlike the habitual, does not get any easier, for the ethical "is a doing that is related to a knowing, and a doing such that the repetition may in more than one way become more difficult than the first doing." (CUP 143) On this level, repetition refers to the act of will through which the abstract possibility supplied by recollection is realized in the concrete realm of obligations and relationships. Once the condition has been restored, recollection refers back to the entry of the eternal into time, an event which, to quote Marion: "remains less a past fact than a pledge given in the past in order, today still, to appeal to a future - an advent, that of the Messiah - that does not cease to govern *this* today from beginning to end." (GB 172-3) Even then, however, it requires a further movement to translate into action the truth which this event reveals, and herein lies the whole difficulty.

For Kierkegaard, if a movement is really to count as a movement, it has to be movement forwards.

> Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly so-called is recollected forwards. Therefore repetition, if it is possible, makes a man happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy - provided he gives himself time to live and does not at once . . . try to find a pretext for stealing out of life, alleging, for example, that he has forgotten something. (R 3-4)

The point is that life can only be understood retrospectively, but it has to be lived forwards. Either way, it is a question of relating the temporal to the eternal. But whereas "The

speculative principle is that I arrive at the eternal retrogressively through recollection . . . an existing individual can have a relationship to the eternal only as something prospective, as something in the future." (CUP 380) While philosophy tries to back out of life, claiming to have forgotten its umbrella, Kierkegaard is intent on restoring its difficulty by showing that spiritual development involves a continual effort to synthesize what must always remain for the existing self an irreconcilable contradiction, equivalent to Hegel's 'unhappy consciousness' without the possibility of a rational resolution. Hence the 'impossible ideality' of the ethical task, and the need to relate to the eternal through the repetition of the encounter with the eternal-in-time and rather than through time itself, in philosophical or historical investigation (recollection). By means of repetition what is encountered in the lower spheres of existence is reconstituted at a higher level. For instance, the aesthetic dichotomy of duty and pleasure is resolved in the ethical paradigm of marriage, itself constituted as a lifelong bond by repetition and renewal.

As Caputo has noticed, what MacIntyre has in common with Heidegger is that both are engaged in the arche-ological exercise of seeking to reverse the progressive distortion of tradition by rewinding history back to some prelapsarian origin;[32] they only disagree about the date of the fall. "MacIntyre does not make a single step forward, which is what repetition demands, but instead makes an elegant, erudite recollective slide backward."[33] Both MacIntyre and Heidegger interpret the history of philosophy as a narrative of decline which has to be repeated backwards, referred back at every step to the standard from which it is alleged to have fallen away. Again, this is the Greek mentality:

> If Greek life in any way denotes any qualification of time, it is past time. However, past time is not defined in its relation to the present and the future but as a qualification of time in general, as a passing by. Here the significance of the Platonic "recollection" is obvious. For the Greeks, the eternal lies behind as the past that can only be entered backwards. (CA 89-90)

If, as Heidegger maintains, philosophy, when it attends to its essence, does not move forwards at all but "remains where it is in order constantly to think the Same,"[34] it could only make progress by ceasing to be philosophy and becoming something else. For Heidegger, the illusion of progress within philosophy is a symptom of faulty recollection, "a mistake that follows thinking as the shadow that thinking itself casts." [35] But even a faultless recollection is confined to the cycle of immanent reflection, in which, for MacIntyre as much as for Hegel, the movement from *archê* to *telos* is a circle whose end is its beginning.

What separates repetition from recollection, both historically and as an existential task, is the event of the Incarnation, which changes everything. As Louis Dupré comments: "[w]hen the Eternal entered the temporal at the moment of the Incarnation it transformed human time-consciousness."[36] The Incarnation transforms both the past and the future, redeeming the past and opening the future to eternity:

> The pivotal concept in Christianity, that which made all things new, is the fullness of time, but the fullness of time is the moment as the eternal, and yet this eternal is also the future and the past. If attention is not paid to this, not a single concept can be saved from a heretical and treasonable admixture that annihilates the concept. One does not get the past by itself but in a simple continuity with the future (with this the concepts of conversion, atonement and redemption are lost in the world-historical significance and lost in the individual historical development). The future is not by itself but in a simple continuity with the present (thereby the concepts of resurrection and judgement are destroyed). (CA 90)

In a sense, the Christian view of eternity is essentially futural, "because in a certain sense the future is the whole of which the past is a part" (CA 89). But the past and future in turn depend on the present, for there can be no division of time into past, present and future without the concept of eternity, which is the present conceived as *the fullness of time*, a moment which is only realized with the advent of Christianity. The division of time into past, present and future does not belong to time itself, in which the present is at best a notional line between past and future which is always passing away. Nowhere is there a foothold for presence to be found in the infinite succession of 'nows' except as "something infinitely contentless, which again is the infinite vanishing" (CA 86). Classical ontology, as Derrida points out, has always determined time as non-being, that which passes away, "the nothingness or the accident foreign to essence or to truth" (MP 47-8). Being, on the other hand, as that which *is*, has always been privileged as presence. "Being is nontime, time is nonbeing insofar as being already, secretly has been determined as present, and beingness (*ousia*) as presence. As soon as being and present are synonymous, to say nothingness and to say time are the same thing." (MP 51) The traditional practice of denying the temporal in order to guarantee the permanence of reason's hold on being is referred to by Marion as "the metaphysical idolatry of the *here and now*" (GB 176). "This ontological overdetermination of a primacy of the present leads to a double reduction of the future and the past . . . their respective temporalities count only negatively, as a double nonpresent" (GB 170).

As that which passes by, "time, if it is to be defined by any of the determinations revealed in time itself, is past time. If, on the contrary, time and eternity touch each other, then it must be in time, and now we have come to the moment." (CA 87) The crucial category in Kierkegaard's analysis of temporality is that of the *moment*, as the fullness of time brought about both in the history of the world and in the life of the individual by the Incarnation. "The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of temporality is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time." (CA 89) The Greeks viewed the moment as an atom of eternity, so that "neither time nor eternity received what was properly its due." (CA 88) In terms of Marion's analysis, the logic of the idol always exalts one term of the relation at the expense of the other, whereas the icon "increases the one all the more that it highlights the other." (GB 23) Hence "[i]t is only with Christianity that sensuousness, temporality, and the moment can

be properly understood, because only with Christianity does eternity become essential." (CA 84)

When Vigilius tries to elucidate the concept of the moment, he can only do so figuratively,[37] in terms of its concrete content. His discussion thus anticipates Heidegger's analysis of time-consciousness as a sensibility for which a 'now' or a 'then' is always the 'now' or 'then' in which something happens, as in "'now - I proceed to analyze the structure of time'." (MFL 200)[38] The three basic phenomena of expectancy, retention and making-present are what Heidegger calls "the *ecstases* of temporality." (MFL 205)

> [They] are not merely the way we grasp the then, the formerly, and the now, not merely modes of being conscious of them; they are rather the very origin of the then, the formerly, and the now. Expectancy is not a mode of being conscious of time but, in a primordial and genuine sense is time itself. (MFL 203)

However, Heidegger's 'ecstases' preserve no trace of the sacramental dimension implicit in Constantine's version of the constitution of temporality by hope, recollection and repetition:

> Hope is a charming maiden but slips through the fingers, recollection is a beautiful old woman but of no use at the instant, repetition is a beloved wife of whom one never tires. For it is only of the new one grows tired. . . . He who would only hope is cowardly, he who would only recollect is a voluptuary, but . . . he who does not comprehend that life is a repetition, and that this is the beauty of life, has condemned himself and deserves nothing better than what is sure to befall him, namely, to perish. For hope is an alluring fruit which does not satisfy, recollection is a miserable pittance which does not satisfy, but repetition is the daily bread that satisfies with benediction. (R 4-5)

If Heidegger's analysis of temporality were to be revitalized with the Christian inspiration of its Kierkegaardian original, one would end up with something like Marion's account of the eucharistic gift as "the ultimate paradigm of every present," a view which reinterprets the present in terms of "the memorial that gives it as a pledge and of the eschatological call that provokes its accomplishment." (GB 176) While the Platonic self thinks itself secure in its possession of an eternal determinant, the Christian believes that eternal happiness is a freely-offered gift, whose reception requires both active appropriation and continual reappropriation:

> Each instant of the present must befall us as a gift: the day, the hour, the instant, are imparted by charity. This applies to the present time (gift given) as to manna: one must gather it each day, without ever being able to store it up or amass it as far as to dispense with receiving it as a gift. . . . The daily character of the bread constitutes it as a definitively provisory gift, always to be repeated and taken up again; it insures against any taking possession of the present . . . (GB 175)

In the gift of the moment, "[t]he pledge, which the memorial sets in operation, now anticipates the future, so that the present itself occurs entirely as this anticipation concretely lived." (GB 174) The temporalization of the present as memorial and pledge traverses history from end to end. "This is a temporality where the present, always already anterior to and in anticipation of

itself, is received to the extent that the past and future, in the name of the Alpha and Omega, give it." (GB 176)

"Recollection is the pagan life-view, repetition is the modern life-view; repetition is the *interest* of metaphysics, and at the same time the interest on which metaphysics founders."(R 34) Repetition is described as the 'interest' of metaphysics because it is only in the moment of passion "that the particular individual is able to realize existentially a unity of the infinite and the finite which transcends existence." (CUP 176) Since this unity can only be renewed in another moment of passion, repetition is the interest on which metaphysics founders, for metaphysics is essentially dispassionate. For Kierkegaard, the realization of authentic selfhood requires something more than the "shock of recognition" (WJ 394) induced by MacIntyre's 'contemporary restatement' of the Platonic-Socratic doctrine of recollection. Only on the basis of repetition is it possible to achieve the kind of enduring commitment implied in MacIntyre's view that "[t]he unity of a life is the unity of a narrative quest," that is, a quest to realize the good, which turns out to be "the life spent in seeking for the good life." (AV 219) The same holds true of his definition of selfhood as "just that identity presupposed by the unity of character which the unity of a narrative requires." (WJ 218) For identity is a product of repetition:

> When the learner is untruth (and otherwise we go back to the Socratic) but is nevertheless a human being, and he now receives the condition and the truth, he does not, of course, become a human being for the first time, for he already was that . . . but he becomes a person of a different quality or, as we can also call it, a *new* person. (PF 18)

If most of MacIntyre's readers are caught "betwixt and between" (WJ 397) the extremes represented by A and B (see above Ch. 1) - those with the ability or good fortune (both of which are aesthetic qualifications) to accept his account as an occasion for self-knowledge and those who can only be saved by "a change amounting to a conversion" (WJ 396) - Climacus' presentation of the same alternatives (the two hypotheses of the *Fragments*) leaves no room to doubt that Christianity requires all three types of reader to undergo a conversion.

One way to bring out what is at stake between MacIntyre and Kierkegaard is by comparing the relationships that each of them sets up with the reader. As "an occasion for self-recognition and self-knowledge" (WJ 394), MacIntyre's description of the encounter between reader and text exemplifies the Socratic model of maieutic communication which Kierkegaard himself sought to emulate. But the truth that he wishes to convey is a 'what' rather than a 'how', for truth is defined in terms of the correspondence between text and reality and the adequation of the author's mind to its object (WJ 363). It is thus an objective 'result' which can be imparted directly and submitted to dialectical scrutiny, rather than an existential communication that only becomes true to the extent that it induces self-activity.

> Objectively we consider only the matter at issue, subjectively we have regard to the subject and his subjectivity; and behold, precisely this subjectivity is the matter at issue. This must

> constantly be borne in mind, namely, that the subjective problem is not something about an objective issue, but is the subjectivity itself. (CUP 115)

The third of MacIntyre's readers is enjoined to discover the extent of his or her incoherence by engaging in dialectical argument with the various traditions on offer. But this just takes us back to the Hegelian confusion of logic and necessity with the category of transition, where the movement always stays within immanence. Now, according to the B hypothesis set out by Climacus, the most that any philosophical teaching can achieve is to act as an occasion for the discovery that one is outside the truth. This is the limit of the Socratic. Meditating on his own authorship, and on the kind of writing that might serve as an introduction to Christianity, Climacus says:

> It will not conceive of Christianity as a doctrine, but as an existential contradiction and an existential communication. It is not historical but psychological, calling attention to how much must have been lived before the problem can have any significance for the individual, and showing how difficult it is to become aware of the difficulty of the decision involved. (CUP 342)

For Kierkegaard, as we have seen, the truth-claim of systematic philosophy is an expression of the unity of thought and being, an abstract identity of subject and object. Existence, by contrast, is characterised by their separation, and its essential elusiveness can only be captured by an indirect form of communication, "namely, the absence of a system." (CUP 111). While the object of recollection is a *what*, repetition is concerned with *how* the communication is appropriated. For "[i]f it is factual that the language of Christian concepts has become in a volatilized sense the conversational language of the whole of Europe, it follows quite simply that the holiest and most decisive definitions are used again and again without being united with the decisive thought."[39] Kierkegaard had to find a way to convey the truth of Christianity to an audience that took its membership of Christendom for granted. But once the language of Christianity has been sufficiently 'volatilized', it is a short step from Christendom to the post-Christian view which takes the opposite for granted, although sometimes even today it is still considered a sign of a deep nature if a person professes her inability to believe. In either case, as Eagleton remarks, it would hardly do to present a reader who lacks ethical seriousness with a direct proclamation of the Christian message. "Rather than confront the reader with an absolute truth that would only be rejected, Kierkegaard must covertly enter the reader's own viewpoint in order to deconstruct it from the inside."[40] Nor can there any question of an impersonal appropriation of moral understanding as there can be, for instance, of mathematics. Where Kierkegaard differs from MacIntyre is in taking this insight seriously enough to incorporate it into the form of his authorship, which is designed to infiltrate the lower spheres of existence from within, "as a set of guerrilla-raids on the reader's false consciousness, a crabwise skirmishing whereby the reader must be approached obliquely, duplicitously, if genuine enlightenment is to dawn."[41] In effect, without faith, the reader of Kierkegaard will simply be repelled by the religious content of his work, hence the subterfuge and indirection of

the aesthetic authorship, whose purpose is to demonstrate the impoverishment of a life spent in merely aesthetic pursuits. The pseudonyms enable him to relinquish control of the text and place the burden of interpretative responsibility on the reader, obliging her to undertake a repetition of the creative act from which the text proceeds. Constantius, for instance, after his comical failure to recapture the joys of his youth in Berlin, concludes that repetition is impossible, at least for him (R 78). It is left to the reader to decide, by repeating the experiment, whether this will be confirmed in her own experience. In this way it becomes evident that "repetition is not merely for contemplation, but that it is the task for freedom, that it signifies freedom itself, consciousness raised to the second power, that it is the *interest* of metaphysics, and at the same time the interest upon which metaphysics founders." (R xxvii) The aesthetic authorship can only conduct the reader as far as the 'collision' with the unknown. By tricking the reader out of his or her illusions it seeks to induce the maximal openness to alterity that is the threshold of the religious. The transition itself depends on a moment of transcendence, an initiative beyond the control of author and reader alike. All that the individual can do is repent, which means making the movement of infinite resignation wherein the world is renounced as a whole. Repetition means that finitude is received back as a task.

3. 3 The Saying and the Said

MacIntyre's contribution to the traditional ontology of Plato and Aquinas is to append an epistemology, by making explicit the epistemological principles which govern the progress of traditions of enquiry. His appeal beyond what can be asserted within particular traditions to the thing in itself, *what is*, relies on a recuperation of the classical correspondence theory with which the metaphysics of *esse* secures its hold on reality. But since the naive realism of the *adequatio intellectus ad rem* is subject to the same kind of critique that he has just used to expose the spurious universalism of modern philosophy, MacIntyre has to supplement it with a coherence theory of the immanent rationality of traditions, a theory exemplified by the way in which Aquinas reconciled the rival systems of Augustine and Aristotle, thus rescuing them both "from imminent, if unrecognized, epistemological crises." (TRV 123). But that theory itself is grounded in turn in the onto-theology whose critique is the subject of this chapter. In the Chapter 4 we shall see what happens if MacIntyre's epistemology is deprived of its ontological foundation.

In MacIntyre's account of Thomism, the primary application of the concepts of truth and being is to God, conceived as the first principle from which everything else proceeds in the manner of a causal and analogical demonstration. "It is from God as truth, *veritas*, that all other 'truths' and 'trues' flow; it is from God as, being, *esse*, that all that is, insofar as it is, derives." (TRV 122) But *we* have to begin from the other end, at the level of empirical

particulars, and infer the existence of God from the order of nature: "So in coming to understand the ordering of each being and each truth or true towards that which is first in being and first in truth, we reverse and retrace the causal order by which they were generated." (TRV 122) As Heidegger puts it: "Being grounds beings, and beings . . . account for Being."[42] God is positioned as the entity *par excellence*, the *causa sui*, the origin of everything that can be recollected and represented in thought. The classical equation of thought and being reaches its logical conclusion in Hegel's principle of the identity of reason and reality, which marks the completion of the philosophical project of reducing transcendence to immanence. Under the rubric of the *adequatio*, infinitude must be surveyed by an infinite consciousness, so that "the *Logic* is a detailed working out of the 'ontological argument', the proof of God from the infinity of thought."[43] But even in the Socratic hypothesis, as Climacus explains, things go the other way round. "He [Socrates] constantly presupposes that the god exists, and on this presupposition he seeks to infuse nature with the idea of fitness and purpose." (PF 44) Kierkegaard renounces both ontology and epistemology in favour of an approach which, as MacIntyre would agree, "is strongly suggestive of the reasoning that underlies Kant's moral proof for the existence of God."[44] He does not question the validity of science, but even objective knowledge is ultimately founded on the belief that the world is intelligible and predictable, and since the choice between doubt and belief in matters of objective uncertainty is dependent in key part on an act of will, ontology and epistemology must be considered subordinate to ethics. Hence "[t]he real subject is not the cognitive subject, since, in knowing, he moves in the sphere of the possible; the real subject is the ethically existing subject." (CUP 281)

While MacIntyre's philosophy, like Hegel's, is worked out in the context of the ontological proof of the existence of God, Climacus points out that no demonstration can do more than develop the definition of a concept whose existence is already presupposed (PF 40). MacIntyre rightly points out that all philosophical systems exhibit this kind of large-scale circularity;[45] but this means that one can only come to accept a new set of premises for action by a radical leap of imagination, or better still a conversion, Because the aesthete has a vested interest in denying the force of ethical arguments, even if such arguments are able to show that the aesthetic life is defective by its own standards, the transition or 'leap' cannot be accomplished by recourse to the principle of sufficient reason but depends on the passion and freedom which Heidegger (see above Ch. 2) has shown to be more fundamental than that principle. The negative expression of this passion is despair, which involves the realization that one has been living an illusion, and that one's life as a whole requires a radical revisioning. A morality that requires intellectual justification will always be hypothetical, dependent on arguments that may be overturned, subject to the question that undermines metaphysics as a whole: "Why the why?" (MFL 214-5) If metaphysics is defined as the enquiry into universal grounds ('Why being rather than nothing?'), then, as Marion says, "it cannot but collapse,

when the obvious necessity of there being a grounding of being turns out to be thrown into question."[46] This was already evident to Kierkegaard, as MacIntyre indirectly suggests when he complains that "the doctrine of *Enten-Eller* is plainly to the effect that the principles which depict the ethical life are to be chosen for no reason, but for a choice that lies beyond reasons, just because it is the choice of what is to count as a reason." (AV 42)

For Kierkegaard, an existing self is constantly in the process either of becoming or of losing itself, and although a person *is* at any given moment a mixture of both good and evil, it is impossible to *become* good and evil at the same time. Here it is a question of either/or, as in the case of the traveller who asked if the road led to London and was told that it did, but who never reached London because his informant failed to tell him that he was going the wrong way (PF 64). Since ontology can neither tell us which way we are going nor how far there is to go, knowledge of the end is neither a sufficient nor even a necessary condition of right action.

> For Ethics does not have the medium of *being*, but the medium of *becoming*, and consequently rejects every explanation of becoming which deceptively explains becoming within being, whereby the absolute decision that is rooted in becoming is essentially revoked, and all talk about it rendered essentially nothing but a false alarm. (CUP 377)

A sufficient reason to choose the ethical could only be supplied if ethics were a regional discipline within ontology, an intellectual exercise whose automatic outcome is the reunion of the individual with the universal, or the minor premise (me) of the practical syllogism with the *archê-telos* (God) nominated in the major premise. In advance of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard's phenomenological reduction of being to becoming undermines the transcendental illusion that makes it possible to distinguish a true world-behind-the-scenes from the world of appearance, thus heralding the end of the kind of philosophy that MacIntyre wants to revive. The impasse of classical ethics is the same as that of immanent rationality, i.e. the need to get outside itself in order to attain its end, the problem of exteriority and of how the other can be constituted in the same.

A comparable insight into the primacy of ethics over ontology can be found in the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas, whose account of the saying and the said is a paradoxical attempt to thematize the interruption of the immanent teleology of consciousness by the non-thematizable ethical responsiveness already signified by language itself, prior to anything thematized within it.

> There is meaning testified to in interjections and outcries, before being disclosed in propositions, a meaning that signifies as a command, like an order that one signifies. Its manifestation in a theme already devolves from its signifying as ordering; ethical signification signifies not for a consciousness which thematizes, but to a subjectivity, wholly an obedience, obeying with an obedience that precedes understanding.[47]

In order for the impersonal structures of reason and ontology to appear at all they must first of all emerge in a discourse between myself and another, a discourse which I always enter in

response to a prior summons to render an account of myself, to expose my position to the perspective of an other, a call to responsibility. Prior to whatever is said, saying signifies a response to an imperative that calls me into question, as if I am answerable to another who is already on the scene, and to whom I am bound in a relation which cannot figure as something that consciousness could trace to an origin, or assemble as memory or historiography. The said is structured by the 'amphibology' or built-in ambiguity of the word 'being', which enables events to congeal into beings, verbs into nouns (OB 42). But before it solidifies, saying signifies the relation between two existents who are outside the field of the said, a relation which precedes both the amphibology of Being/beings and the distinction between being and non-being. Before the subject/object nexus which organizes the language of predication, subjectivity is constituted by this excess in the saying which overflows the correlation between saying and the said. Prior to anything said, the self-exposure of my entry into language signifies my obedience to an order that puts me at the other's disposal. As Alphonso Lingis notes, Levinas reinterprets Kant's account of the constitution of moral autonomy by the rational discovery of the law "to mean that the Law I recognize is first formulated in my own words of obedience - the "Here I am." (OB xxxiv - xxxv)

In a system of signs, one thing stands for another in a process of substitution, but what is signified by the system as a whole is the proximity of one to another that makes signification possible (OB 69). Antecedent to the verbal signs conjugated by the verb 'to be', the identification of essences and ascription of meanings, saying signifies "the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of signification." (OB 5) Is this just playing with words? Only if the signifyingness of saying is indeed exhausted in the said. If transcendence is constituted by the structures of the said rather than the other way round there can be nothing outside the circulation of information, or cybernetics, in which case, to quote Vigilius again: "[m]an qualified as spiritless has become a talking machine, and there is nothing to prevent him from repeating by rote a philosophical rigmarole, a confession of faith, or a political recitative." (CA 95) If there is to be something in the self that transcends the slippage within the same which makes meaning and identification possible, something more to selfhood than a particular instance of the general, then the subject must be non-identical, divided from itself by the constitution of the other within the same. Only if subjectivity is fissured in this way can the task of life be defined in terms of becoming a self. And only if the individual is higher than the universal can there be such a thing as genuine selfhood, beyond the ego and the immanent teleology of its *conatus essendi*. Ipseity, or selfhood, is not reducible to the adventure of self-consciousness, losing and finding itself in the labyrinth of immanence. The subject is non-identical, sundered by a relation to alterity which is always already inscribed within the same. "In the form of responsibility, the psyche in the soul is the other in me, a malady of identity, both accused and *self*, the same for the other, the same by the other." (OB 69) Thus, subjectivity is structured in advance by an ethical requirement

which precedes any consciousness of it, and this requirement, "as always having taken place no matter what actual response I make, is without limit, infinite, and so summons me to infinite responsibility for the Other."[48] Ethics is therefore first philosophy, for the relation to the other "is prior to ontology, the reflection upon impersonal rational structures."[49]

As Michael Weston points out, both Kierkegaard and Levinas take philosophy to task for subordinating the individual to the universal and neglecting the first-person position from which the philosopher speaks.[50] It is perhaps necessary to repeat that this emphasis on the individual is far from being the pernicious individualism of liberal capitalism from which MacIntyre seems unable to distinguish it (although they are dialectically related, for neither conception could have emerged without the historical influence of a specifically Christian understanding of the self). Rather, the singularity of subjectivity is correlative to the otherness of the absolutely other. "The problem of transcendence and of God and the problem of subjectivity irreducible to essence, irreducible to essential immanence, go together." (OB 17) As Derrida puts it: "God looks at me and I don't see him and it is on the basis of this gaze that singles me out [*ce regarde qui me regarde*] that my responsibility comes into being." (GD 91)

> But not in the sense of a (Kantian) autonomy by means of which I see myself acting in total liberty or according to a law that I make for myself, rather in the heteronomy of an "it's my lookout" even when I can't see anything and can take no initiative, there where I cannot preempt by my own initiative whatever is commanding me to make decisions, decisions that will nevertheless be mine and which I alone will have to answer for. (GD 91)

Personal identity is not so much a question of 'the unity of a single life' (AV 218) as of the singularity of a unique responsibility. If I could exchange my responsibility with someone else, as a particular instance of a universal humanity, there would be no such thing as subjectivity, which consists in the irreplaceability of my responsibility for the other, a responsibility signified even before saying by my corporeality and vulnerability to persecution (OB 55). Levinas defines the 'incarnation' of selfhood in terms of an asymmetrical, irreversible relation in which I am called to be my brother's keeper, to the point of being a hostage, expiating for him the violence which he inflicts upon me (OB 136). This paradoxical subjectivity is both surplus and deficit, a debt which is prior to any loan and increases in the measure that it is repaid (OB 112). The more just I am, the greater becomes my guilt, which is precisely what Nietzsche found most intolerable about Christianity. This dimension of responsibility is invisible to MacIntyre, who is content to stay with the reciprocity of his Aristotelian ethic of proportional desert, an economy of reward and punishment which depends on the stability of an objective scale of values. But the underlying imperative which makes the discourse of justice and universality possible (OB 159) is the incommensurable singularity of a responsibility which cannot be evaded, an unsubstitutable requirement to substitute myself for the other. Where Nietzsche opposes the dialectic of equivalences with his affirmation of difference, Levinas argues that the true significance of difference is my non-indifference (OB 71) to the plight of

the other, and that this, rather than the reciprocity of reward and retribution, is what is signified in giving.

The privileging of the performative over the constative in the Levinas' account of the saying and the said is congruent with Kierkegaard's insistence that Christianity is an existential communication which cannot be comprehended in a set of propositions. Saying signifies not only my relation to others but primarily what Anti-Climacus calls the relation of the self to the power which establishes it as a self, a self whose goal is to become itself and rest transparently in that relation (SD 82). Before the distinction between freedom and unfreedom, activity and passivity, or the correlation of will and end (OB 95), subjectivity is subjection to this ordering to the other by the Other. The saying arises in response to an exteriority which both constitutes me as a subject and fissures my subjectivity by means of an imperative which is closer to me than I am to myself, an immediacy which can only be dissimulated in the medium of language. It is not that the face of the other functions in proximity as "a sign of a hidden God who would impose the neighbour on me." (OB 94) This would be to uphold the unity of being and allow the abyss of transcendence to be crossed by a calculation assured of success. The face of the other is the trace of an abandonment, a homelessness so destitute that it is "reduced to having recourse to me." (OB 91)

> Abandoned, but by whom or by what? Is this the emptiness of abandonment, or . . . merely extension, a medium indifferent to the comings and goings of men, penetrable like nothingness, thinkable before all proximity? . . . Is it the trace of the excession, the excessive, of what could not be contained, of the non-content, disproportionate to all measure and capacity, the trace of the infinite signifying diachronically precisely through these ambiguities? The empty space of what could not be collected there is the trace of a passage which never became present, and which is possibly nothingness. But the surplus over pure nothingness, an infinitessimal difference, is in my non-indifference to the neighbour, where I am obedient as though to an order addressed to me. Such an order throws a 'seed of folly' into the universality of the ego. (OB 91)

The self does not arise on its own initiative; it was made "in a time of birth or creation, of which nature or creation retains a trace, unconvertible into a memory." (OB 105) "The oneself is a creature, but an orphan by birth or an atheist no doubt ignorant of its Creator, for if it knew it it would again be taking up its commencement." (OB 105) Instead of being part of the causal chain of recollection, in which nothing is ever lost, so that "in coming to understand the ordering of each being and each truth or true towards that which is first in being and first in truth, we reverse and retrace the causal order by which they were generated," (TRV 122) the self is a repetition without an original, a 'recurrence' which "refers to the hither side of the present in which every identity identified in the said is constituted." (OB 105) For the saying and the said do not belong to the same order of temporality. In the proximity signified by saying, the distance required for adequation or consciousness of the other as an entity or image is suppressed, so that my presence is not equal to the urgency of the summons. "I am accused of having delayed" (OB 89). The situation resembles the anachronism of a debt that

precedes any freely incurred loan or contract, as in the paradox of original sin, wherein I seem to have become guilty by fate ("Precisely this is the greatest contradiction, and out of this contradiction Christianity breaks forth." (CA 97-8)). Proximity "opens the distance of a diachrony without a common present, where difference is the past that cannot be caught up with, an unimaginable future, the non-representable status of the neighbour behind which I am late." (OB 89) The said, meanwhile, synchronizes everything that can be recollected, projected or presented for conscious reflection, exactly as in Heidegger's account of ecstatic temporalization. Time is spatialized within a consciousness which surveys the region of being from one end to the other in an immanental recollection of the chain of effective causality. As Haufniensis puts it, "for abstract thought, time and space are entirely identical, and become so for representation, and are truly so in the definition of God as *omnipresent*." (CA 86) While the said orchestrates the circulation of information, the saying signifies both beyond the text (of a book, the world etc.) and on the hither side it of in the 'real' time of the reader's subjectivity, the diachrony of wasted time, ageing and irreparable loss. Now, a central part of MacIntyre's strategy for dealing with Nietzsche - and with the relativism resulting from the failure of Kierkegaard and others provide an ontological foundation for ethics - is his assertion that a meaningful encounter between reader and writer can only take place in "that atemporal 'now' . . . at which both can appeal away from themselves and the particularity of their own claims to *what is* timelessly, logically, ontologically, and evaluatively." (TRV 45) (Here, to save time, I am taking as given what Graham Ward[51] says about the need to supplement Levinas' emphasis on the immediacy of the spoken word with Derrida's concept of primary writing.) This is a good example of the synchronic time of the said, the time recoverable by memory or history and thematizable in a narrative, the common time of clocks that makes such meetings possible.

In its desire for comprehension and totality, the discourse of ontology engulfs all alterity and can only signify transcendence in terms of an intensification of the concept of being. But according to Levinas, "[i]f transcendence has meaning, it can only signify the fact that the *event of being*, the *esse*, the *essence*, passes over to what is other than being." (OB 3) It follows that, for Levinas, the problem is to bring the otherwise than being to language, which always identifies truth with being. Any attempt to convey the saying in the said results in the inevitable betrayal of representing the other in the medium of the same, in much the same way as, for Kierkegaard, the language of Christianity is volatilized by philosophy. The saying can only figure in a text as an interruption of the logic of the said, an interruption which always risks sounding like nonsense, an unsaying of the said which jolts the reader out of the synchrony of MacIntyre's 'metaphysics of reading' and into the diachronic time of a proximity which constitutes the precondition of reading and writing. But without the ontological said, the ethical saying would remain a sheer transcendence of which nothing could be known. Like

the God of philosophy and the God of scripture who commands obedience, they belong to irreconcilable orders of discourse which are nonetheless interdependent. As Weston says:

> We are compelled . . . to recognize the necessity for both the logic of the said *and* its disturbance, and thus to attempt to bring to language the source of this necessity, an attempt which in its perpetual failure keeps us alive to the relation to the Other which is infinite responsibility. We must incessantly unsay the said to which the saying is reduced, and we do so by returning from the book within which it is written to the living nature of our responsibility for the Other (which may, of course, result in, among other things, another book).[52]

MacIntyre points out that even Nietzsche recognized the necessity to posit beings and provisional identities in order "to enter into those relationships constitutive of the acts of reading-as-one-who-has-been-written-for and of writing-as-one-who-is-to-be-read." (TRV 45-6) But what the saying puts in question is precisely what he calls the "impersonal, timeless standards" (TRV 45) by which the text is judged, the same standards which he invokes in order to refute relativism and perspectivism (WJ 366-9) - although, as Haldane points out (AM 98-9), MacIntyre fails to explain what prevents his own position from leading to relativism, and this, as we shall see, is just what he cannot do if its ontological component becomes untenable (see below Ch. 4). For what makes it possible to put forward the relativist and perspectivist claims is the incommensurability of the saying and the said, without which these claims would be contradicted by the condition of their utterance, as would all talk of the otherwise than being. The contradiction, however, only becomes apparent with reflection, after the event: "it does not break out between two simultaneous statements, but between a statement and its conditions, as though they were in the same time." (OB 156)

Levinas links the self-refuting character of the relativist claim to the inevitable betrayal of the saying in the said, the tension between transcendence and closure.

> Skepticism, at the dawn of philosophy, set forth and betrayed the diachrony of this very conveying and betraying. To conceive the *otherwise than being* requires, perhaps, as much audacity as skepticism shows, when it does not hesitate to affirm the impossibility of statement while venturing to *realize* this impossibility by the very statement of this impossibility. If, after innumerable "irrefutable" refutations which logical thought sets against it, skepticism has the gall to return (and it always returns as philosophy's illegitimate child), it is because in the contradiction which logic sees in it the "at the same time" of the contradictories is missing, because a secret diachrony commands this ambiguous or enigmatic way of speaking, and because in general signification signifies beyond synchrony, beyond essence. (OB 7)

As Simon Critchley notes, the entire history of philosophy can be read as the dialectic of scepticism and its refutation. "Scepticism is the refutable par excellence; one might say it exists only to be refuted."[53] But scepticism always returns, for as Climacus understood, doubt is only conquered by an act of will (PF 83). Like the non-ontological saying and its ontological thematization in the said, scepticism and its refutation constitute a pair that can neither be separated nor combined in a higher synthesis. Logic cannot accommodate this paradox, and

therefore misses both the significance of saying and its non-simultaneity with the said - the delay between the summons to responsibility signified by saying and its exposition as first philosophy. When Climacus maintains that truth is subjectivity, the claim seems to be immediately contradicted by its representation as an objective truth. "However, such a contradiction is possible only if it is assumed that the Saying and the Said occupy the same synchronic temporality."[54]

> The periodic return of skepticism and of its refutation signify a temporality in which the instants refuse memory which recuperates and represents. Skepticism . . . is a refusal to synchronize the implicit affirmation contained in saying and the negation which this affirmation states in the said. The contradiction is visible to reflection, which refutes it, but skepticism is insensitive to the refutation, as though the affirmation and negation did not resound in the same time. Skepticism then contests the thesis that between the saying and the said the relationship that connects in synchrony a condition with the conditioned is repeated. (OB 167-8)

On the level of the said, it is quite correct to argue that there is ultimately no irreducible incommensurability. The incommensurability comes in with the reassertion of subjectivity, as expressed in Nietzsche's perspectivism, the constant interruption of the said by the saying which makes the language of justice and parity possible. Just as, for Kierkegaard, the highest function of the understanding is to distinguish the incommensurable from the merely incompatible, for Levinas, the proper task of philosophy is to reduce the said to the saying. (OB 165) Unless MacIntyre wants to be a full-blown Hegelian he ought not to have any objection.

In the last analysis, neither Levinas nor Kierkegaard are sceptics, but nor do they subscribe to the view that scepticism can be overcome by reasoning. Instead, they each call attention in different ways to the dimension of alterity opened up within the tautological closure of identity by the co-existence of incommensurable orders of discourse. The signification of saying, "outside of every system, before any correlation, is an accord or peace between planes which, as soon as they are thematized, make an irreparable cleavage." (OB 70) For Kierkegaard, doubt is more advanced than objective knowledge, which in any case is always an approximation, hence his disdain for historical research as a tool of biblical criticism (CUP 25-47).Whereas his predecessors sought to overcome doubt by making ideality conform to reality (empiricism), or the reverse (idealism), Climacus recognizes that the difficulty signifies that consciousness is a 'contradiction'.

> The moment I make a statement about reality, contradiction is present, for what I say is ideality. . . . In reality by itself there is no possibility of doubt; when I express it in language, contradiction is present, since I do not express it but produce something else. Insofar as what was said is supposed to be an expression of reality, I have brought this into relation with ideality; insofar as what was said is something produced by me, I have brought it into relation with reality. (JC 168)

Kierkegaard's use of the term 'contradiction' is somewhat misleading, for here it is not a question of logical incompatibility but of *irreducible* incommensurability, which for MacIntyre is a contradiction in terms. While Hegel ruled out the possibility of doubt by denying the existence of any mind-independent reality, for Kierkegaard there can be no refuge from scepticism in some fantastic fusion of subject and object in a "rendezvous in the clouds." (CUP 176) Equally, no certainty can be founded on the immediacy of sense-impressions because as soon as they are reflected in consciousness one has left immediacy and introduced the possibility of misinterpretation. The statement that truth is subjectivity is sensitive to the difference between what Climacus calls 'reflection', which is the abstract juxtaposition of reality and ideality, and 'consciousness', which presupposes reflection. It is important to bear in mind that Kierkegaard lacked the sophisticated terminology developed by later phenomenologists. Levinas makes a sharp distinction between 'subjectivity' and 'consciousness', using the latter term to refer to what Kierkegaard calls 'reflection'. In using 'consciousness' as a synonym for 'self' or 'spirit', Kierkegaard is guilty of which Levinas sees as the reduction which has always dominated the philosophical tradition (OB 103). But I would suggest that the full significance of Kierkegaard's reinterpretation of the Platonic distinction between reality and ideality can only be brought out if it is regarded as a precursor of Levinas' distinction between the existential diachrony of the saying and the abstract synchrony of the said.

Everything in the realm of ideality is true, just as it is in reality; it is only when they are brought together that the possibility of a misrelation arises.

> Reflection is the *possibility of the relation*; consciousness *is the relation, the first form of which is contradiction*. As a result . . . reflection's categories are always *dichotomous*. For example, ideality and reality, soul and body, to know the true, to will the good, to love the beautiful, God and the world, etc. are categories of reflection. (JC 169)

Here one is reminded of MacIntyre's dualistic definition of the self as a "soul-informed body" whose life takes the form of a quest to discover and realize its *telos* (TRV 196-7), a definition which serves as the basis of the final stage of his critique of those who have learned from Nietzsche. "The categories of consciousness, however, are *trichotomous*," for "as soon as I as mind become two, I am *eo ipso* three." (JC 169)[55] In the opening lines of *The Sickness unto Death* Anti-Climacus comes straight to the point:

> A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. (SD 13)

The self is not the immediate synthesis but its relation to itself conceived as "the positive third." (SD 13) As soon as spirit is posited, however, the relation is apprehended as a contradiction, hence the possibility of doubt, which is the misrelation. The contradiction arises when I make a judgement about reality, thus transposing it into an alien medium, the ideality

of the said. (JC 168) "If there were nothing but dichotomies, doubt would not exist, for the possibility of doubt resides precisely in the third, which places the two in relation to each other." (JC 169)

In the binary logic of philosophical reflection, everything is synchronized in such a way that there can be no transition in the Kierkegaardian sense of a transcendence. On this level, an argument can have only one outcome, and if the categories of reflection and the cognate metaphysics of *esse* had anything to do with ethics MacIntyre would be justified in putting his faith in the infallibility of dialectics. His refutation of scepticism employs both of the traditional strategies: an idealist appeal to the coherence of systems and the rationality of traditions is supported by the empirical belief that the correspondence of a theory to reality can be guaranteed by the repeatability of experiments. Since their challenge must be issued from a standpoint outside all traditions of rational enquiry, his opponents do not have a leg to stand on. "To be outside all traditions is to be a stranger to enquiry; it is to be in a state of intellectual and moral destitution, a condition from which it is impossible to issue the relativist challenge." (WJ 367) But as Anthony Rudd points out, the sceptic is not putting forward a rival theory which would require alternative standards of justification. "Confronted with those who do claim to have knowledge, he may use premises and logical rules that they accept in order to draw conclusions that they do not."[56] More than one conclusion would not be possible unless the logic of the said were interrupted by a diachrony which escapes the control of the rational ego. This is why MacIntyre and Gadamer, both following the path of the Platonic-Socratic dialectic, are able to end up at such very different destinations. Concerning the philosophical discovery of the historical contingency of all human thought, Gadamer writes:

> In particular, it is no refutation of the acceptance of this fundamental contingency if this acceptance itself seeks to be true absolutely, and thus cannot be applied to itself without contradiction. The consciousness of contingency does not do away with contingency. It is one of the prejudices of reflective philosophy that it understands as a relationship of propositions that which is not at all on the same logical level. Thus the reflective argument is out of place here. For we are dealing not with relationships between judgements which have to be kept free from contradictions, but with living relationships.[57]

The point here is that ethical and religious questions can only be asked from a first-person standpoint, the site of a unique singularity which cannot be subsumed under a concept or enter into the dichotomous categories of reflection. MacIntyre's quest for self-discovery is an adventure played out within a maze of mirrors, wherein "the detour of ideality leads to coinciding with oneself." (OB 99) It is therefore no adventure at all. "It is as though subjective life in the form of consciousness consisted in being itself losing itself and finding itself again so as to *possess itself* by showing itself, proposing itself as a theme, exposing itself in truth." (OB 99) All philosophical reflection is disinterested, which is why Kierkegaard is sympathetic to the Greek sceptics, who made a virtue of doing without it. Consciousness, however, is interested

(literally *inter-esse* = being between). "Therefore, all disinterested knowledge (mathematics, esthetics, metaphysics) is only a presupposition of doubt. As soon as the interest is cancelled, doubt is not conquered but is neutralized, and all such knowledge is simply a retrogression." (JC 170)

Ethical and religious knowledge are essentially subjective and interested. This does not mean that truth is whatever I want it to be, but rather that "what is at issue is not the correspondence of statements to facts, but the truth or otherwise of a life."[58] It is not really a question of knowledge at all but of belief, for there can be no objective demonstration of the reality of ethical or religious claims. "The conclusion of belief is no conclusion but a resolution, and thus doubt is excluded." (PF 84) This is where Kierkegaard parts company with the scepticism embraced by such as Hume, who are content for the sake of a quiet life to conform with the customs and norms of their society without being committed to the truth of any dogma. Such an attitude, which anticipates what Karen Carr describes as the 'unrepentant' nihilism of secular postmodernity (see below, Chapter 4), is quite alien to the passionate concern for authentic selfhood and salvation driving Kierkegaard. Where the sceptic prefers not to choose, in matters of serious ethical concern there is no question of neutrality; it is always a question of either/or. The ethical begins with the choice of choice itself, for to choose not to choose is precisely to deny the ethical. But this is the logic of the categorical 'thou shalt' rather than the hypothetical equation of goodness and intelligence. Similarly:

> That Christianity is proclaimed to you means that you shall have an opinion about Christ; He is, or the fact that He exists and that He has existed is the decision about all existence. If Christ is proclaimed to you, then it is offense to say: I do not want to have any opinion about it. (SD 129)

According to Weston, although he comes closer than any of the other candidates (i.e., Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida), Levinas does not ultimately succeed in avoiding Kierkegaard's critique of speculative philosophy. In locating the ethical in a primordial relation to which one is already committed, Levinas depicts it as something that one can be argued into, which implies that my ethical responsibilities "require an intellectual inquiry in order to determine their bindingness on me: it is crucial as Levinas says, to establish whether 'we are duped by morality'."[59] For Kierkegaard, however, any confusion of the ethical with the intellectual undermines the possibility of true responsibility. To depict the ethical as something that requires intellectual justification is to repeat the classical move of privileging a "staff of clever brains" (CUP 204) as God's self-appointed assistants. This is why Kierkegaard develops the art of indirect communication, which does not try to argue the reader into the ethico-religious "but merely to make clear what is involved in a *rejection* of . . . an immanent determination of the significance of one's life, one form of which is *precisely the desire for an intellectual ground*."[60]

> Life as infinite giving *cannot be justified*, but can only be desired through a giving up of *all* desire for justification. It then appears as something which must be *given*, as beyond human powers, and so in a relation to what is *absolutely* other to the human, a transcendence which cannot be thought, even in an abuse of language, but only *worshipped* . . .[61]

However, Weston's conclusion fails to do justice to the tension between the saying and the said in Kierkegaard's own work, where his hostility to systematic philosophy functions as a constant unsaying of his rigorously systematic account of the structure of subjectivity and the process of spiritual growth. More seriously, Weston fails to notice that Levinas extends his indictment of traditional ontology to the equally propositional discourse of religious experience (not to mention that of Husserlian phenomenology), so that MacIntyre and Kierkegaard are both implicated in his critique of representation, insofar as their respective standpoints can be aligned with the God of philosophy and its Pascalian alternative. "Immanence and consciousness, as gathering up the manifestation of manifestation, are not disturbed by the . . . interpretation that starts from fear and trembling before the sacred, and understands them as primary lived states."[62] Levinas is quite explicit about his views on Kierkegaard: "There are two main things that irritate me about Kierkegaard."

> The first is this. Kierkegaard very powerfully rehabilitated the topics of subjectivity, uniqueness and individuality. He objected to the absorption of subjectivity into Hegelian universality, but he replaced it with a subjectivity that was shamelessly exhibitionistic. . . . And second: what shocks me about Kierkegaard is his violence. An impulsive and violent style, reckless of scandal and destruction, was added to the philosophical repertory by Kierkegaard, even before Nietzsche. Philosophers could now philosophise with a hammer.[63]

He even goes as far as to suggest a direct link between the 'verbal violence' of Kierkegaard and the rhetoric of National Socialism. One could point out that Nietzsche was not talking about running amok with a sledgehammer but of striking idols with a tuning fork to find out whether they are hollow (TI xviii). Nevertheless, there remains a case to answer which is more formidable than any criticism put forward by MacIntyre, in that it applies to Kierkegaardian phenomenology just as much as to classical ontology. However - and this is crucial - Levinas does not exclude "the possibility that, in another direction besides that of a tendency going to its term, there may break out an affectivity which breaks with the form and purpose of consciousness, and leaves immanence, is a transcendence." (GP 57) This brings us back to the conversion from Platonic *eros* to Christian *agape*, or religiousness A to religiousness B. "Eros is acquisitive love, man's way to perfection, egocentric. In short, it is motivated by desire for an object, however lofty. Agape . . . is spontaneous and unmotivated, not limited by any desire, or the value or lack of it of any object."[64]

In order to show that subjectivity is constituted by that which infinitely exceeds it, Levinas turns to the passage in Descartes' *Meditations* where the *ego* is said to be stamped with the impression of its creator. As something not thought but undergone, it is as if the idea of the Infinite turns the mind inside-out. "The putting into us of an unincludable idea overturns

that presence to self which consciousness is . . . signifying with a signifyingness prior to presence . . . prior to every origin in consciousness and thus an-archical, accessible in its trace."[65] The depth of this undergoing awakens a passion which transcends the eroticism of any conceivable hedonistic or eudaemonist fulfilment, a desire for the Good beyond being. This desire can only be kept from a re-absorption in immanence "if the desirable orders me to what is the non-desirable, the undesirable par excellence - the other." (GP 63) But note that this transaction obeys the same logic as Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical: the individual is not, as in Kant and MacIntyre, related to God by means of the ethical-universal, but instead is directed to the neighbour by virtue of a prior relationship to the absolutely other, the other of the other. "Agape . . . does not indicate man's way to God by loving the neighbour, nor even man's love for God, but fellowship within God's love, within God's way to man."[66] MacIntyre is quite correct to situate Kierkegaard against the backdrop of Kant's critique of metaphysics, but whereas Kant collapsed religion into morality, Kierkegaard, like Levinas, elevates it to the level of "an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical bond with another and different from every neighbour, transcendent to the point of absence."[67] While Kant paved the way for Nietzsche by promoting the autonomy of the self-legislating individual, Kierkegaard depicts the ethical as a heteronomous ideality which cannot be realized without conscious dependence on grace. The difference between the ethical and the religious spheres of existence is this: "[t]he religious exister relates to himself through his God relationship instead of relating to God through his relation to himself."[68]

In contrast to the adequation of the intentional teleology of consciousness to the objects given in being, the Infinite idea does not originate in human consciousness, rather it is "through the non-comprehension of the infinite [that] thought is posited as thought, as a posited subjectivity."[69] This is the state of affairs implied by Climacus' alternative to the hypothetical imperative, an alternative which is itself presented as a hypothesis, but one which neither he nor anyone else could have invented:

> Presumably it could occur to a human being to poeticize himself in the likeness of the god or the god in the likeness of himself, but not to poeticize that the god poeticized himself in the likeness of a human being, for if the god gave no indication, how could it occur to a man that the blessed god could need him? This would indeed be the worst of thoughts . . . even though, when the god has confided it to him, he adoringly says: This thought could not arise in my heart - and finds it to be the most wondrously beautiful thought. (PF 36)

Here, surely, is an idea that has managed to "abjure its letters patent of Socratic nobility, its immanent birth in reminiscence, that is, its origin in the very presence of the thought that thinks it."[70] Since the mind cannot ascend to God without either being destroyed or transformed into something divine, He has to descend to us in the guise of a suffering servant and run the risk of going unrecognized. It is the entry of the eternal into time that makes it

possible for a finite consciousness to be penetrated by an infinite idea, just as the Incarnation makes it possible for eternal life to have a beginning in time.

It is undeniable that Kierkegaard's positioning of the ethical has more in common with Nietzsche's venture beyond good and evil than with MacIntyre's ethic of the golden mean and proportionality. This is why it is possible to confuse, as Eagleton seems to do, the autonomy of Nietzsche's sovereign individual with Kierkegaard's transcendence of the ethical: "the moral law for Nietzsche, as with the Mosaic code for St Paul, is merely a ladder to be kicked away once mounted. It forms a protective shelter within which one grows to maturity; but it must then be abandoned, in a Kierkegaardian 'suspension of the ethical', for the adventure of free self-creation."[71] But for Kierkegaard, as we saw in Chapter 2, the adventure of self-creation is precisely the most aggravated form of sin: the Promethean hubris of proposing what one's own self will contain. The point here is not that the superior man is able to soar above good and evil but rather that goodness is beyond the reach of our natural capacities, as Levinas knows full well.

> No one is good voluntarily. We can see the formal structure of this nonfreedom in a subjectivity which does not have time to choose the Good and thus is penetrated with its rays unbeknownst to itself. But subjectivity sees this nonfreedom redeemed, exceptionally, by the goodness of the Good. The exception is unique. And if no one is good voluntarily, no one is enslaved to the good. (OB 11)

When Levinas says that the trouble starts with Kierkegaard's 'transcendence of the ethical',[72] this almost looks like a wilful misreading. Perhaps the situation is best explained by Vigilius Haufniensis. "Ethics proposes to bring ideality into actuality," (CA 16) but since the idealism of ethics is shipwrecked on the fact of sin, dogmatics "begins with actuality in order to raise it up into ideality." (CA 19) "So the new science begins with dogmatics in the same way that immanental science begins with metaphysics. Here ethics again finds its place as the science that has as a task for actuality the dogmatic consciousness of actuality." (CA 20) Citing Aristotle's classification of metaphysics as 'first philosophy', he suggests that it was quite in order for theology to be treated there in pagan philosophy.

> If we now abstract from this ambiguity, we could retain this designation and by . . . [first philosophy] understand that totality of science which we might call 'ethnical', whose essence is immanence and is expressed in Greek thought by 'recollection', and by *secunda philosophia* [second philosophy] understand that totality of science whose essence is transcendence or repetition. (CA 21)

If Vigilius could have read Levinas he would probably have regarded his output as an expression of the 'guilt-consciousness' of the ethical. "It is precisely by the anxiety of guilt that Judaism is further advanced than Greek culture, and the sympathetic factor in its anxiety-relation to guilt may be recognized by the fact that it would not at any price forego this relation in order to acquire the more rash expressions of Greek culture: fate, fortune, misfortune." (CA 103-4). But guilt-consciousness is not yet consciousness of sin, for it retains

a belief in the efficacy of its own sacrifice, its own ability to put things right. Instead of hereditary sin, Levinas posits only the original goodness of creation (OB 121), and this, it can be argued, together with his account of the unmediated incarnation of the self, returns us to the generality of natural theology and the *analogia entis*.[73] Kierkegaard is able to safeguard the particularity of ethical subjectivity to the extent that his 'second philosophy' is regulated by a Christology.

Notes

1 George L. Stengren, "Thomism," in *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*, Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana, vol. 6, pp. 117-8.
2 John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, p. 9.
3 Caputo, *ibid.*, p. 5.
4 Stengren, *ibid.*, p. 119.
5 "The end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world. The end of philosophy means the beginning of the world civilization that is based on Western European thinking." *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, in *Basic Writings*, p. 435.
6 "Since man is the most important raw material, one can reckon with the fact that some day factories will be built for the artificial breeding of human material, based on present-day chemical research." Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, p. 106.
7 Heidegger defines cybernetics in terms of the management of human resources. "No prophecy is necessary to recognize that the sciences now establishing themselves will soon be determined and regulated by the new fundamental science that is called cybernetics . . . Cybernetics transforms language into an exchange of news." Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, in *Basic Writings*, p. 434.
8 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, *ibid.*, p. 332.
9 Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, *ibid.*, p. 238.
10 Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, *ibid.*, pp. 432-3.
11 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, p. 72.
12 Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, in *Basic Writings*, p. 253.
13 See for instance *Identity and Difference*, p. 72.
14 See Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 1, pp. 81-2.
15 See Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, in *Basic Writings*, pp. 311-341.
16 Quoted from a report in *Berichte aus der Arbeit der Evangelischen Akademie Hofgeismar*, 1, 1954 [trans. Hart and Maraldo, p. 65].
17 Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, in *Basic Writings*, p. 436.
18 Heidegger, *What Calls for Thinking?* in *Basic Writings*, p. 376.
19 Evans, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, p. 71.
20 Heidegger, *What is Metaphysics?* in *Basic Writings*, p. 110.
21 "Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals beings as a whole." *Ibid.*, p. 99.
22 Cf. Heidegger, "What must be thought about turns away from man. . . . how can we have the least knowledge of something that withdraws from the beginning, how can we even give it a name? . . . What withdraws from us draws us along by its very withdrawal, whether or not we become aware of it . . . Once we are drawn into the withdrawal, we are . . . caught in the draft of . . . what withdraws. We are who we are by pointing in that direction - not like an incidental adjunct but as . . . an essential and therefore constant pointing. . . . As he draws toward what withdraws, man is a sign." *What Calls for Thinking?* in *Basic Writings*, pp. 374-5.
23 From the historical analysis carried out by Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. P. S. Watson, London: S.P.C.K., 1953.
24 Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle*, pp. 168-9.
25 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 206, p. 126.

26 I am indebted to George J. Stack, *Kierkegaard's Existential Ethics*, pp. 52-3, for suggesting this as the probable source of Kierkegaard's concept of repetition.
27 Stack, *ibid.*, p. 134.
28 As Anti-Climacus remarks: "The Greek mind posits an intellectual categorical imperative." (SD 90)
29 Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 217.
30 David Wood, *Thinking God in the Wake of Kierkegaard*, in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Ree and Jane Chamberlain, pp. 64-5.
31 Alastair Hannay, Introduction to *Fear and Trembling*, p. 26.
32 Commenting on Heidegger's genealogy of the verb 'to be' and of the growing privilege accorded to the third person singular of the present indicative in the form of the copula: 'is', Derrida asks: "Is not to examine this history . . . as the history of meaning, and to ask the 'question of Being' as the question of the 'meaning of Being' (Heidegger), to limit the destruction of classical ontology to a reappropriation of the semantic plenitude of 'Being', a reactivation of the lost origin, etc.? . . . Is it not to suspect a kind of original fall in the copula, with all that such a perspective would imply?" (MP 203.) The implications are thoroughly Platonic, in a sense which recalls Augustine's criticism of the Platonic and Manichean equation of embodiment with corruption.
33 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 243.
34 Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, in *Basic Writings*, p. 238.
35 *Ibid.*
36 Louis Dupré, *Of Time and Eternity*, in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 8, ed. Robert L. Perkins, p. 124.
37 Both in Danish (*Oibblikket*) and in German (*Augenblick*) the word for the 'moment' signifies a blink of the eye.
38 For a useful account of the debt which Heidegger's analysis of temporality owes to Kierkegaard, as well as of the inaccuracy of his own assessment of that debt, see Dan Magurshak, "The Concept of Anxiety: The Keystone of the Kierkegaard-Heidegger Relationship," in *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 8, ed. Robert L. Perkins.
39 Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation: The Book on Adler*, p. 166.
40 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 187.
41 *Ibid.*
42 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, p. 62.
43 Quentin Lauer, "Hegel on the Identity of Content in Religion and Philosophy," in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Darrel E. Christiansen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p. 271.
44 Stephen Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation*, p. 67.
45 "This type of circularity . . . I take to be an ineliminable feature of systematic philosophy. Our *telos*, our end, theoretical or practical, is already in our beginnings." MacIntyre, "Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble? The Relevance of System and History," p. 75.
46 Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians," in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward, p. 283.
47 Emmanuel Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward, pp. 70-1.
48 Weston, *Kierkegaard and Modern Continental Philosophy*, p. 163.
49 Weston, *ibid.*, p. 161.
50 Weston, *ibid.*, p. 156.
51 For Derrida the traditional tendency to privilege speech over writing is a logocentric practice which promotes the illusion of presence; the absence of the signified is conveyed more effectively by writing. "He proceeds to unveil the fact that appeal to God as the author of speech leads Levinas back to a metaphysics of presence, whereas the only coherent appeal is to God as the author of writing and a metaphysics of absence." Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*, p. 183.
52 Weston, *ibid.*, p. 166.
53 Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 159.
54 Critchley, *ibid.*, p. 167.
55 Heidegger makes a similar point regarding the fundamental principle of differentiation through which order is brought into the world: "'Three' is not the third number, but the first number. . . . Only when we perceive it from the third is the former one the first, the former other the second, so that one and two arise, and 'and' becomes 'plus', and there arises the possibility of places and of a series." *Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics*, in *Basic Writings*, p. 277.
56 A. J. Rudd, "Kierkegaard and the Sceptics," in *The British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 6 (1) 1998,

p. 72.
57 Hans-Goerg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 406-7.
58 Rudd, *ibid.*, p. 85.
59 Weston, *ibid.*, p. 172. (quoting from Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 21.)
60 Weston, *ibid.*, p. 173.
61 *Ibid.*
62 Levinas, "God and Philosophy," *ibid.*, p. 57.
63 Levinas, "Existence and Ethics," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Ree and Jane Chamberlain, p. 34.
64 Rose, *The Broken Middle*, p. 169.
65 Levinas, "God and Philosophy" *ibid.*, p. 60.
66 Rose, *ibid.*
67 Levinas, "God and Philosophy," *ibid.*, p. 64.
68 Evans, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, p. 43.
69 Levinas, "God and Philosophy," *ibid.*, p. 61.
70 *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.
71 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, p. 254.
72 Levinas, "Existence and Ethics," *ibid.*, p. 34.
73 See Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*, p. 163.

4. KIERKEGAARD, MACINTYRE AND NIETZSCHE

The first part of this chapter is an attempt to expose the limitations of MacIntyre's dichotomy of rational excellence and rhetorical effectiveness by correlating it with the distinction made by Kierkegaard between the 'what' of theoretical reason and the 'how' of practical reason. After that, I will suggest that the ethical critique of ontology discussed in the previous chapter leaves MacIntyre with no defence against Nietzsche's account of Platonism as a tradition of enquiry that leads inexorably to nihilism. Along the way, I will try to address the main points of MacIntyre's criticism of Kierkegaard, before concluding with an outline the most important elements of a possible Kierkegaardian response to Nietzsche. These tasks cannot, however, be kept entirely separate, for while "[t]he necessities of thematization in which they are said ordain a division into chapters," as Levinas attests, "the themes in which these concepts present themselves do not lend themselves to linear exposition, and cannot be really isolated from one another without projecting their shadows and reflections on one another. Perhaps the clarity of the exposition does not suffer here only from the clumsiness of the expounder." (OB 19)

4.1 The How and the What

Despite the Hegelian tendency in his account of rational progress, MacIntyre's narrative is, like Nietzsche's, a negative counterpart of Hegel's myth of evolution, but only up to a point. From Plato to Aquinas, each philosopher was able to contribute to the growing edifice of human knowledge simply by building on the work of his predecessors, but since the Enlightenment they have only succeeded in compounding each other's mistakes. Such is the importance, for MacIntyre, of the rupture between classical and modern philosophy, that the way to get to the heart of his disagreement with Kierkegaard is to ask whether the effects of the Enlightenment are more profound or significant than the 'foolishness' which, according to Paul, is the stumbling-block between Christianity and the wisdom of the Greeks. In Kierkegaardian terms, is the impact of MacIntyre's 'hidden cataclysm' deeper than the gulf between the two hypotheses, Socratic and Christian, put forward in the *Fragments*, or the difference between the natural theology of religiousness A and the paradoxical theology of religiousness B developed in the *Postscript*? Either way, the question hardly seems admissible. On the one hand, for Kierkegaard, there is no question at all of measuring the discontinuity between two epochs in the history of philosophy on the same scale as the distance between divine revelation and natural reason, transcendence and immanence, God and humanity. For MacIntyre, on the other hand, the question does not arise because, like Nietzsche, he sees no essential difference between Christianity and Platonism.[1] Indeed, his critique of Kierkegaard

(AV 39-54) is worked out in the context of an argument in which he explicitly invests the hypothetical imperative of Greek philosophy with an authority equal to that of the law ordained by God. "This scheme is complicated and added to, but not essentially altered, when it is placed within a framework of theistic beliefs, whether Christian, as with Aquinas, or Jewish with Maimonides, or Islamic with Ibn Roschd." (AV 53) While conceding that, for Aquinas, the final goal of human life now transcends this world (AV 53), MacIntyre insists that the means thereto can still be found in the immanental capacity of reason, claiming that 'the theistic version of classical morality' works with a 'double standard' in which the logic of the practical syllogism is reinforced by faith in divine revelation. "To say what someone ought to do is at one and the same time to say what course of action will in these circumstances as a matter of fact lead toward a man's true end and to say what the law, ordained by God and comprehended by reason, enjoins." (AV 53) Since the Aristotelian formula predates Christianity it can doubtless stand alone, whatever its deficiencies in the light of later Thomistic refinements (WJ 205). But it would seem that Christianity, when deprived of its rational support by the modern rejection of Aristotle, can only degenerate into fideism. Following Eckhart's 'distortion' of Thomism, the art of preaching comes to rely on rhetoric rather than reason, an infection which is spread to philosophy by those such as Heidegger who regard language as something more than a tool for dialectical agonistics (TRV 165-9). MacIntyre's dualism of reason/rhetoric thus corresponds to the familiar dichotomy between the God of philosophy and the God of unreasoning faith. But is this a necessary or even a genuine alternative? Are we compelled to choose between *epistêmê* and *poiêsis*? As we shall see, Kierkegaard would not have thought so.

For MacIntyre, the refusal of history to conform to the path of rational and moral progress is not, as in Nietzsche and Heidegger, due to any intrinsic defect in the premises on which western civilization is built, but rather to an accidental series of errors which in principle can be reversed by unpicking the causal thread which binds them together. The 'Enlightenment project' was bound to fail because the morality it inherited could only be rationally justified in the context of the teleological conception of human nature which it rejected. The infamous split between facts and values is the inevitable result of an attempt to derive ethics from the wrong set of facts, i.e., from human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be rather than human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*. The starting point for his attempt to reverse this unhappy train of events is Kierkegaard's attempt to ground morality in what MacIntyre takes to be the concept of arbitrary freedom, an attempt which supposedly set the scene for the preference-based morality of liberal modernity:

> Just as Hume seeks to found morality on the passions because his arguments have excluded the possibility of founding it on reason, so Kant founds it on reason because *his* arguments have excluded the possibility of founding it on the passions, and Kierkegaard on criterionless fundamental choice because of what he takes to be the compelling nature of the considerations which exclude both reason and the passions. (AV 49)

Far from being excluded however, as we have seen, reason and passion are central to Kierkegaard's account of moral and spiritual development: reason in order to distinguish the incomprehensible from nonsense (paradox from contradiction), or, in MacIntyre's terminology, incommensurability from logical incompatibility, and passion in order to distinguish what is of essential concern to an existing individual from all merely objective information. Together, reason and passion constitute the 'paradoxical passion of thought' that wills its own downfall (PF 37), whose continual collision with its own limit leads the understanding to acknowledge its exclusion from the truth. This is the limit of the Socratic model of learning, and prior to the granting of the 'condition', or possibility of faith, the most one can hope to accomplish is the act of self-renunciation which Johannes de silentio calls the movement of infinite resignation. Admittedly, the role played in this by reason and passion is a negative one, leading to a progressive discovery of the limitations of successive spheres of existence - but this is what allows Kierkegaard to differentiate the otherness of the absolute *telos* from all immanent, relative goals, and thereby to separate Christianity from the tradition of Platonic-Hegelian speculation.

I do not wish to deny that philosophy can be of service to Christianity, but to argue that the only alternative to the rational tradition of metaphysical theology which, as Marion suggests, "reached its positive conclusion with Hegel and its negative with Nietzsche," is the phenomenological mode of enquiry (or 'psychology' as S. K. calls it) pioneered by Kierkegaard.

> To remain rational when posing questions about God, must we necessarily and exclusively follow the paths which lead to 'the God of philosophers and savants', since this route would of necessity start from the conclusions of metaphysics? . . . Has not the task of philosophy been to take us beyond these conclusions, through the whole of this century, by assuming nonmetaphysical forms, the most potent of which . . . remains phenomenology?[2]

Before Kierkegaard, mainstream philosophy always treated the particular as an instance of the general, so that the relations between individuals were mediated not only through a knowledge of that kind of being, but primarily of being in general. Classical philosophy regarded human nature as a universal essence whose components could be analysed and ordered without reference to the accident of temporal existence. Modern philosophy took this practice to its logical conclusion by isolating the subject from the world in which it exists, reified as the thing that thinks.[3] But in life we never encounter such impersonal conceptual structures; they belong exclusively to the realm of thought, which is only one dimension, albeit an essential one, of human existence. What had always been excluded from philosophy was any account of existence as lived from within, and this, as John Wild points out, is no small omission.

> This lived existence cannot be squeezed into a 'private corner' of some vast objective framework . . . It is far too basic and pervasive for this, and is bound to explode with devastating consequences. We cannot escape from subjectivism by evading the so-called subject. We must rather go into this 'subject' and find out what and how it really is.[4]

Kierkegaard's investigation of subjectivity was primarily an attempt to distinguish the existential communication of Christianity from the abstract objects of speculation by relating it to such 'accidental' features of existence as boredom, anxiety, guilt, despair, and the prevailing moods of the spheres of existence, not forgetting the 'boundary zones' of humour and irony. These obscure phenomena are what Wild calls 'existential values' as opposed to the 'essential values' identified by classical ethics:

> These existential values are not so much concerned with *what* should be chosen as *how* the choice should be made. They are not virtues or kinds of act, but rather ways of acting that pervade all the so-called virtues, as the first act of being pervades every formal phase of the essence it realizes.[5]

An example of such an existential value might be the concept of *virtue* in the singular, which MacIntyre describes as an etiolated survival of the classical conception of the *virtues* as an integrated whole (AV 233). When Aristotle declares: "Virtue makes the project right" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1144a7-8) (WJ 136) he seems to be expressing the insight that "there is a 'how' which has this quality, that if *it* is truly given, then the 'what' is also given; and that is the 'how' of 'faith'. [*Journals*, No. 1021 (X2 A 299)]"[6] In other words, subjectivity at its maximum coincides with objectivity. (Hegel's mistake was to reduce subjectivity to reason and to imagine that the ultimate synthesis could be achieved by philosophy. In fact he went the other way round and started with objectivity, which is supposed to provide the content for the completely abstract subjectivity of an empty absolute.) The same idea informs the epistemology which Aquinas inherited from Augustine. As Fergus Kerr points out, in the eschatological vision of the face to face encounter with God "what happens is that what is actually known (the divine essence in this jargon) is itself how the mind actually knows. The divine reality occupies the minds of the blessed in such a way as to be the condition as well as the object of knowledge."[7] (And for Aquinas, the *how* coincides perfectly with the *what* in God, for the essence of God is to exist.) As an end-state, however, this leaves open the question of which takes priority in the temporal order, the 'how' or the 'what'. Should ethics be derived from ontology or is there a surplus in the good that cannot be reduced to being? In the Christian alternative to Platonic recollection, where the teacher must provide both the truth and the condition for understanding it (PF 14), what comes first is the condition (faith), though not in the Hegelian sense as a stage to be superseded. And inasmuch as the subjective 'how' takes precedence over the objective 'what', speculation becomes a distraction, hence the Christian reversal of the classical identification of knowledge with virtue: "Christian teaching is the opposite - that virtue is knowledge. From this comes the expression - to do the truth." (CA 227)[8]

However, thinking and communicating are also kinds of doing, and in a discourse which purports to shed light on the fundamental questions of existence everything depends on

the 'mood' of the discipline within which a concept is treated. The concept of sin, for instance, properly belongs to dogmatics:

> Thus when sin is brought into esthetics, the mood becomes either light-minded or melancholy, for the category in which sin lies is that of contradiction, and this is either comic or tragic. The mood is therefore altered, because the mood that corresponds to sin is earnestness. The concept of sin is also altered . . . it becomes . . . something that endures, or something nonessential that is annulled, whereas, according to its true concept, sin is to be overcome. (CA 14-15)

If sin is dealt with in metaphysics the concept is again distorted, for the mood of dialectical disinterest gives it the aspect of an intellectual error, "something that cannot withstand the scrutiny of thought." (CA 15) Again, the requisite earnestness is lacking, particularly in Greek philosophy where reason has yet to fully emerge from the aesthetic: "This appears clearly in its definition of virtue and in what Aristotle frequently, also in *Ethica Nicomachea*, states with amiable Greek naiveté, namely, that virtue alone does not make a man happy and content, but he must have health, friends and earthly goods and be happy in his family." (CA 17). Outside of dogmatics, the closest approximation to sin is to be found by enquiring into the psychological state in which it takes root, namely the state of anxiety. Vigilius defines anxiety as both the presupposition and the consequence of hereditary sin. It is the primary modulation of what Heidegger calls the 'ecstasis' of expectancy (MFL 203-5), an intimation of the terrifying possibility of freedom, in which the self is stretched out into the future by a vague apprehension of *being able*: "freedom's showing-itself-for-itself in the anxiety of possibility." (CA 76-7) The object of this anxiety is not sin, for one does not yet know the difference between good and evil. The object of anxiety is nothing. "Here there is no knowledge of good and evil etc., but the whole actuality of knowledge projects itself in anxiety as the enormous nothing of ignorance." (CA 44) The proper object of anxiety is always this nothing, which grows more and more substantial until, as the object of despair, it constitutes the emptiness of nihilism, both in the history of the individual and that of the race (every individual participates in the race by re-enacting Adam's fall, the qualitative 'leap' into sin).

Anxiety belongs to the transition between possibility and actuality, innocence and guilt, a gap which metaphysics tries to bridge with logic. "The intermediate term is anxiety, but it no more explains the qualitative leap than it justifies it ethically." (CA 49) In order to demonstrate the necessity of its cancellation, Hegel identified innocence with immediacy, for neither innocence nor immediacy can appear at all without having first been annulled.[9] This is why it is futile for Nietzsche to protest his innocence in the face of the accusation of sin, since "[t]o him who is essentially innocent it can never occur to cast guilt away from him, for the innocent man has nothing to do with the determinant we call guilt." (CUP 470-1) However, contra Hegel, whereas the annulment of immediacy is merely "an immanent movement within immediacy, or . . . an immanent movement in the opposite direction within mediacy, by which

mediacy presupposes immediacy," (CA 37) innocence is lost by means of a qualitative transition which it is unethical to consider necessary.

> Innocence is not an imperfection in which one cannot remain, for it is always sufficient unto itself, and he who has lost it, that is, not in a manner in which it might have pleased him to have lost it but in the only way in which it can be lost, that is, by guilt - to him it could never occur to boast of his perfection at the expense of innocence. (CA 37)

Nor is it a perfection one should wish to regain by pretending that it has never been lost, "for as soon as one wishes for it, it is lost, and then it is a new guilt to waste one's time on wishes." (CA 37)

Once sin has been posited there are two forms which anxiety can take. The first, anxiety about evil, corresponds to the 'bad conscience' which Nietzsche saw as the essence of Christianity. The second form is anxiety about the good, or 'the demonic', which, as we shall see, is how Kierkegaard would have interpreted Nietzsche's own position. "The bondage of sin is an unfree relation to the evil, but the demonic is an unfree relation to the good." (CA 119) The opposite of anxiety, and its only cure, is repentance. If I am still anxious about a past offence (bad conscience), this is because it has not been captured by repentance and remains a possibility for the future: "I have not placed it in an essential relation to myself as past and have in some deceitful way or another prevented it from being past." (CA 91-2) If, on the other hand, the offence is to be wiped out as if it had never been, the unchangeableness of the past must be "not only dialectical with regard to an earlier change, from which it results, but must be dialectical even with regard to a higher change that nullifies it. (For example, the change of repentance, which wants to nullify an actuality.)" (PF 77) Thus the past is no more necessary than the future, another theme taken up by Heidegger.

> What-has-been is, of course, no longer something present, and to that extent one might arrive at the common inference that nothing can be altered; it is finished. This is not the way it is. The having-been-ness, rather, of what-has-been becomes the having-been, first of all and constantly, in the respective future. The very fact that we say "we are not capable of getting rid of the past" indicates a certain mode of our having-been. What we find here expressed regarding the essence of temporality is that the future ecstasis, as a coming towards, stretches out immediately, constantly, and primarily into the having-been. (MFL 206-7)

For Kierkegaard, however, things do not progress quite so smoothly, for "[t]he moment sin is posited, temporality is sinfulness," and "death follows in turn as punishment." (CA 92). Hence the imperfection of the aesthetic mode of life, which is lived "only in the moment as abstracted from the eternal" (CA 93). Sin can only be overcome by an interruption of the temporalization of immanence described by Heidegger. "On the other hand, as soon as sin is posited, it is of no help to wish to abstract from the temporal any more than from the sensuous." (CA 93) Time must be penetrated by the eternal. Only on the basis of a repetition in which the self is reborn and the world made new can what Nietzsche calls a "courteous memory" (TRV 210, quoted from *Daybreak*, II, 126.) become an authentic prospect, which is why he was forced to come

up with the doctrine of eternal recurrence as an ethical principle of selection (see above Ch. 2). MacIntyre's treatment of this question of memory and accountability, which cannot be separated from his philosophy as a whole, depends on arguments (refutations of scepticism) which remain unresolved - this is the starting point of his whole enterprise. But all such arguments are ultimately hypothetical and hence always liable to be overturned. What is required for a decisive response to Nietzsche is therefore not a conclusion but a resolution, a constantly renewed decision.

It might be assumed that sin would be the proper concern of ethics, but instead it leads to ethical despair, for the ethical is an uncompromising ideality, and to be a little bit moral is precisely to be immoral. Since the essence of the ethical is the good, the more ideal it is, the better. "Ethics points to ideality as a task and assumes that every man possesses the requisite conditions." (CA 16) But in the struggle to actualize the task of ethics, the sin of the individual withdraws deeper and deeper until it merges with that of the race (CA 19). Just as the presupposition that virtue can be realized is demolished by the discovery of hereditary sin, the concept of rational accountability founders on the contradiction that the individual seems to have become guilty by fate, "and thereby he is supposed to have become something that precisely cancels the concept of fate, and this he is supposed to have become by fate." (CA 98) But whereas fate is defined as "the unity of necessity and the accidental" (CA 97), sin is neither a necessity nor an accident, and stands in an essential relation to providence rather than to fate. As MacIntyre admits himself, with the consciousness of sin, the highest expression of the ethical becomes the acknowledgement that one lacks the capacity to realize it, so that sin belongs to ethics "only insofar as upon this concept it is shipwrecked with the aid of repentance." (CA 17)

In fact, "[s]in does not properly belong in any science, but it is the subject of the sermon, in which the single individual speaks as the single individual to the single individual." (CA 16) The problem with moral philosophy is that it always abstracts from the first-person standpoint of the existing individual, which it cannot help subsuming under a general concept of human nature. This is equally true whether the meaning of human existence is conceived in terms of MacIntyre's 'essential natures', or in the world-historical terms of whatever is portrayed as the requirement of the present age, as in Nietzsche's active nihilism, Heidegger's task for thinking, and in MacIntyre too insofar as he takes on board their genealogical critique of the blindness of philosophy to its own contextuality. As soon as it is treated as a matter for objective enquiry, the question of the meaning of life takes on the abstract, impersonal quality of something which can be communicated directly, or read in a book. But the question only has meaning for me when posed in the first-person, as the question of *how* I should live my life. The answer cannot be a *what* - an item of information comprehensible to an abstract subject, for if it is to provide the source of significance for my life as a whole - as in MacIntyre's concept of the unity of a single life - it cannot be anything subordinate to my

power of understanding. Unfortunately, however, when it comes to the question of 'what is the good?' "Hitherto, the true has in a strange way had the priority, because the trilogy - the beautiful, the good, the true - has been conceived and represented in the sphere of the true (namely, as knowledge)." (CA 111) As Levinas puts it: "[i]n conformity with the whole tradition of the West, knowing, in its thirst and its gratification, remains the norm of the spiritual, and transcendence is excluded both from intelligibility and philosophy." (OB 96)

The problem with the practice of moral philosophy, even (perhaps especially) when it takes its bearings from Augustine and Aquinas, is that it requires a high degree of intelligence. Thus the teleology of cognition belongs to the quantitative register of the aesthetic (in this case the aesthetic-metaphysical), in which the value of existence is relative to human capacities, like the aristocratic virtues of the Aristotelian *polis* or those of Nietzsche's self-legislating overman. But according to Climacus, "God is affronted by getting a group of hangers-on, an intermediary staff of clever brains; and humanity is affronted because the relationship to God is not identical for all men." (CUP 204) What comes into view here is the soteriological orientation of his critique of philosophy, for, as Nietzsche makes clear, the only equality to be found in the world is that of the juridical and logical abstractions constructed by human beings as an aid to survival. Only an absolute *telos*, beyond anything that humans could propose or accomplish, can provide a measure which is the same for all, which is why all political attempts to establish equality were anathema to Kierkegaard. As Howard A. Johnson comments: "[t]o establish man-made ethical absolutes must end in the complete denial of absolutes."[10] The parallel with Nietzsche's account of nihilism as the devaluation of the highest values is obvious. Before God, however, but only before God, the difference between the readership addressed by Climacus and those relatively lacking in education and leisure "consists in the insignificant trifle that the wise man knows that he knows, or knows that he does not know, what the plain man knows." (CUP 204)

This partly explains what MacIntyre refers to as Kierkegaard's moral conservatism (AV 43), although, in view of his sharp distinction between the classical virtues and the requirements of Christian discipleship, it is only half true to say that Kierkegaard does not question the content of the morality he inherited. MacIntyre claims that the "incoherence at the heart of Kierkegaard's position" is due to his juxtaposition of a traditional account of morality with a radically new way of founding it. "It is certainly . . . just this deeply incoherent combination of the novel and the inherited which was the logical outcome of the Enlightenment's project to provide a rational foundation for and justification of morality." (AV 43) To be sure, MacIntyre's comments are mostly confined to the conventional morality represented by Judge Wilhelm in *Either/Or*, but he claims that the 'radical change' undergone by Kierkegaard's account of the ethical in such later works as *Fear and Trembling* does not essentially affect his criticism (AV 41). (It would be more accurate to refer to the increasing clarity of Kierkegaard's positioning of the ethical in relation to human capacities than to a

change in its character.) The inference of this criticism is that the content of the ethical can no longer be made intelligible if it cannot be grounded in the teleological framework of classical ontology. However, it is crucial to Kierkegaard's position that there should be no difficulty about the 'what' of ethics, in order to allow one to concentrate on the 'how'.

> The ethical is quite consistently always very easy to understand, presumably in order that no time may be wasted, but a beginning made at once. On the other hand it is quite difficult to realize - equally difficult for the wise and for the simple, since the difficulty does not lie in understanding it. If it were a matter of understanding, the clever would have a great advantage. (CUP 350)

Even if the ethical were a matter of understanding, as MacIntyre is well aware, the goal of moral enquiry is an ever-receding horizon. "Every article in the *Summa* poses a question whose answer depends on the outcome of an essentially uncompleted debate." (WJ 171-2) Since the best answers to have emerged so far are always liable to be overturned by some as yet unforeseen argument, there can be no way of ruling out "the possibility that what has so far been accepted may have to be modified or even rejected." (WJ 172) MacIntyre frequently insists that this maximal vulnerability to refutation is an essential feature of any reputable philosophical system, but Climacus points out that "the absence of a conclusion has the retroactive power to make the beginning doubtful and hypothetical, which is to say: unsystematic." (CUP 17) Since the starting point of MacIntyre's enquiry was the apparent intractability of philosophical disagreements, he presumably hopes to secure an objective basis for agreement. But the open-ended character of dialectical enquiry ensures that the process will continue indefinitely; "and while the grass grows under his feet the inquirer dies, his mind at rest, for he was objective." (CUP 33)

> There are indeed, in the objective sense, results everywhere, a superfluity of results. But there is no decisive result anywhere. This is quite as it should be, since decisiveness inheres in subjectivity alone, essentially in its passion, and maximally in the personal passion which is infinitely interested in an eternal happiness. (CUP 34-5)

MacIntyre himself argues that, in order to make a beginning, a person embarking on a moral education must be induced to accept on trust a set of norms and principles whose importance can only be appreciated retrospectively. "So . . . in coming to understand the human good, the truths about that good which are finally to be attained through arduous inquiry must themselves already be presupposed in the earliest phases of that inquiry, by the way in which inquiry has to be organized at its outset."[11] This hermeneutical circle not only functions as a justification for respecting the authority of tradition, it also provides a way out of the problem of the *Meno*. But in choosing this solution rather than the Christian alternative, MacIntyre adheres to the Socratic principle "that all learning and seeking are but recollecting." (PF 9) What he fails to explain is how the presuppositions of moral enquiry are exempt from his objection to pluralism. Since philosophy always comes too late, so that the undisciplined and inexperienced beginner cannot be expected to have an adequate grasp of the result of what is,

after all, an endless enquiry, "[a]ll that can be offered on the smorgasbord of theories for acts of consumer choice are counterfeit versions, reinterpreted to fit the pragmatic and aesthetic modes of modernity, and so not at all the substantive theories with whose incommensurability I have been concerned."[12] So it turns out that certain truths must be taken on trust for precisely the same reason that makes it impossible to trust any of them. This is why doubt and belief are higher than knowledge, and the risk and danger of the leap preferable to the ingenuity with which philosophy has mastered the category of transition.[13]

The primary function of MacIntyre's discussion of Kierkegaard is a genealogical one, its purpose being to demonstrate that there are "certain large and obvious features of Kant's thought which declare it to be the immediate ancestor of Kierkegaard's" (AV 45) What Kierkegaard has in common with Kant is a conviction of the heterogeneity of theoretical and practical reason, a disjunction which generates what Derrida calls 'the aporia of responsibility'. It is one thing to make a dialectical transition in the course of rational argument, but it is quite another to make the 'pathos-filled transition' involved in choosing between incommensurable existential alternatives.

> Saying that a responsible decision must be taken on the basis of knowledge seems to define the condition of possibility of responsibility (one can't make a responsible decision without science or conscience, without knowing what one is doing, for what reasons, in view of what and under what conditions), at the same time as it defines the condition of impossibility of this same responsibility (if decision-making is relegated to a knowledge that it is content to follow or to develop, then it is no more a responsible decision, it is the technical deployment of a cognitive apparatus, the simple mechanistic deployment of a theorem). This *aporia of responsibility* would thus define the relation between the Platonic and Christian paradigms throughout the history of morality and politics. (GD 24)

While MacIntyre assumes that the practical reasoning of Christianity and Platonism share a common paradigm, Kierkegaard would maintain that the conversion from paganism to Christianity requires a far more radical paradigm-shift than that involved in the transition from classical to modern philosophy, or in MacIntyre's attempt to reverse that transition. Progress from one sphere of existence to another can only be prompted by despair over the paradigm currently shaping one's life. No reason can be given for such a transition because what counts as a reason is determined by the way I already relate to my life. MacIntyre rightly interprets this to mean that an individual can be given no reason to adopt an ethical way of life. "If it already has force for him, he has already chosen the ethical, which *ex hypothesi* he has not." (AV 40) But he is wrong to pose the problem in terms of an abstract subject confronted with the choice between the ethical and the aesthetic "having as yet embraced neither" (AV 40), for the person faced with such a choice must already have reached the reflective stage of the aesthetic, and become aware of the contradiction (ironic from the outside, tragic within) between the satisfaction afforded by aesthetic pursuits, such as moral philosophy, and the significance of life as a whole.

This is where genealogy comes in. If knowing how to live is a question of deciding what should count as a reason, the obvious place to look is to that mode of enquiry which asks: "Why the why?"[14] - the question on which, according to Marion,[15] the timeworn metaphysical certainties have foundered. Genealogy seeks to uncover the hidden history of philosophy, the values for life at work in the affirmation of certain ideals, in particular that of the primacy of truth. For Nietzsche, "To be truthful is to ask what function this illusion played: why it was believed, where this is not directed to the 'reasons' that way of life had but to why it had those reasons."[16] By probing the existential values underlying those which MacIntyre professes to be essential ones, genealogy is able, in his own words,

> not only to identify as limitations, defects, and errors of the opposing view what are or ought to be taken as limitations, defects, and errors in the light of the standards of the opposing view itself, but also to explain in precise and detailed terms what it is about the opposing view which engenders just these particular limitations, defects, and errors and also what it is about that view which must deprive it of the resources required for understanding, overcoming and correcting them. (TRV 146)

But in order to identify what should count as limitations, defects, and errors, genealogy must have standards of its own, which simply shifts the demand for reasons to another level. And, as we shall see, these standards turn out to be purely quantitative: a continuum of strength and weakness which is just as questionable as that of intellectual prowess or any other immanent criterion.

MacIntyre himself is quick to defend the ability of "plain persons" (TRV 136) to conduct their lives in ways which embody the traditional structure of practical reasoning, but only in the context of communities which have yet to succumb to the corrosive of liberal individualism and its preference for the goods of effectiveness over those of excellence (AM 284-6). This dichotomy between rational excellence and rhetorical effectiveness, Aristotle and Nietzsche, runs right through MacIntyre's philosophy, where it becomes convertible with the difference between incompatibility and incommensurability. This is because the ultimate purpose of his project is to reduce the apparent incommensurability of his opponents' position to a form in which it can be refuted, just as philosophy always reduces transcendence to immanence, mystery to comprehension, infinity to totality, the other to the same, for, As Levinas puts it, "[p]hilosophy is not merely the knowledge of immanence; it is immanence itself."[17] At first sight, the respective attributes of reason and rhetoric in MacIntyre's scheme seem to correspond to those of the Kierkegaardian categories of the ethical and the aesthetic, but Kierkegaard's distinction between the ethical 'how' and the ontological 'what' reverses this correspondence. Whereas MacIntyre, like Plato, attempts to suppress the aesthetic, while Nietzsche absolutizes it, for Kierkegaard its significance is not confined to the existence sphere it governs, but (like the orgiastic mystery in Patočka's dialectic) is taken up into the ethico-religious as the 'second immediacy' of faith (the point being that faith is not, as Hegel taught, an aesthetic immediacy superseded by reason).

> The subjective thinker is not a man of science, but an artist. Existing is an art. The subjective thinker is aesthetic enough to give his life aesthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, and dialectical enough to interpenetrate it with thought. (CUP 314)

Kierkegaard's estimation of the aesthetic was strongly influenced by Aristotle, from whom MacIntyre derives his one-sided dependence on the moral and rational authority of the practical syllogism. M. Jamie Ferreira has noticed that, in his *Journals*, Kierkegaard explicitly identifies Aristotle's *enthymeme*, or rhetorical syllogism, as the best means of inducing someone to undergo the transition to a higher sphere of existence.

> The difference between enthymeme and scientific demonstration for Aristotle lay in the character of the premises, not in its persuasive potential. The subject-matter of enthymemes is, almost exclusively, 'what is to be chosen or avoided in human conduct' and such arguments address the objects toward which people aim, including goods of various sorts as well as 'release from evil'. An enthymeme is rhetorical - that is, it is geared to its audience, recognizing that, as Aristotle says, "'persuasive' means persuasive to a person".[18]

This agrees with Milbank's account of *phronêsis* as a rhetorical faculty that appeals primarily to examples, rather than a dialectical removal of the veil of appearance from some universal truth, which can then be abstracted without further ado from the context of the Aristotelian *polis*.

> It can be argued . . . that Aristotle's understanding of both induction to the ends, and deduction from them, in the sphere of ethical *praxis*, is a rhetorical one, and that this detaches the practical sphere more firmly from *theoria*, and so from the theological, than MacIntyre allows. There is, in Aristotle, no 'dialectical' give and take occurring between a theoretical projection of ends and a practical specification of means. . . . The important consequence of stressing the rhetorical component in Aristotle, and the disconnection of *praxis* from *theoria*, is that it makes it much harder to read him as providing a permanently valid support for any kind of theory of natural law.[19]

As Cornelio Fabro points out, for Aristotle, the first principles of ethics are objects of belief rather than scientific knowledge. Even MacIntyre acknowledges that every chain of reasoning terminates in a fundamental intuition or *nous*, conceding that "something other than logical acumen," a "seeing that" or "insight" is needed to complete the movement of *epagogê* toward a first principle, though he insists this must receive support from previous dialectical arguments (WJ 224). An example of such 'seeing that' would be Socrates envisioning a moral God and infusing the whole of nature with purpose. This suggests that an existential transition is more a question of deciding *that* (*this* is the way things are) rather than deciding *to*, or making an arbitrary selection from various options. What Kierkegaard took from Aristotle was the suggestion that "Rhetoric constitutes the part of philosophy whose task it is 'to further conviction' (*Rhetoric* 1354 a 2)"[20] Far from being antithetical, "rhetoric and dialectics complement each other, they are both part of ethics, which rightly could be called political (ethics). (*Rhetoric* 1356 a 26)"[21] This led him to call for the introduction of "a new science: the Christian art of rhetoric constructed along the lines of Aristotle's Rhetoric. (Pap. VI A

17)"[22] If dialectics is the idiom of the lecture, that of the sermon is rhetoric, which is subject to a dialectic of its own. Where Kierkegaard differs from Aristotle is over the role of prudential reasoning (*phronêsis*).

> Christian rhetoric would differ from Greek rhetoric in its only having to do with the improbable, with proving that it is improbable, so that one then can believe it. The former must dismiss probability just as much as the latter must dismiss improbability, but they both share the feature of being different from knowledge. (Pap. VI A 17)[23]

What Aristotle lacked was the negative category of the absurd, which is inevitably a scandal to reason. Faith is not a matter of the correspondence of reason and reality, but of the relationship between an existing individual and God. As such it can be said to provide an Archimedian point outside all systems of signification, though not a 'neutral' one.

> Faith is, quite rightly, 'the point outside the world' which is able to move the whole world. It is easy to see that the point outside the world is that which emerges through the negation of all points within the world. The syllogism which, from the fact that there is no righteousness in the world, but sheer unrighteousness, would prove that there *is* a righteousness - which must, consequently, be outside the world: here is the point outside. This is the syllogism of faith. Take the absurd. Denying the adequacy of conceptual thinking forces one outside the world to the absurd - and here is faith.[24]

As the negative criterion of transcendence, the function of the absurd is to ensure that it is not mistaken for anything within the compass of immanence. Far from being a sign of irrationalism, it requires the most rigorous exercise of reason in order to distinguish the absurd from all the absurdities which MacIntyre calls 'philosophical fictions'. As that which defines the limit of human capacities, the absurd is a sign of despair, but despair is the negative criterion of faith.

> When the believer believes, the Absurd is not the Absurd - faith transforms it; but in every weak moment, to him it is again more or less the Absurd. The passion of faith is the only thing capable of mastering the Absurd. If this were not so, faith would not be faith in the strictest sense, but would be a kind of knowledge.[25]

According to Fabro, Kierkegaard was particularly impressed by the distinction Aristotle makes between three kinds of belief: the first based on the character of the speaker, the second on the mood of the listener, and the third deriving from the speech itself and the effectiveness of its demonstration.[26] In descending order, all three are important for Kierkegaard's theory of communication. The whole of the pseudonymous authorship is designed to capture the various moods, comic or ironic, that mark the transition from one sphere to another. But what matters most of all is the character of person speaking.

> *The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said.* This distinction holds even in the aesthetic realm, and receives definite expression in the principle that what is in itself true may in the mouth of such and such a person become untrue. (CUP 181)

When the person who is speaking also happens to be God we arrive at the formula for the Christian model of learning, in which the how and the what are identical, for *the teaching is the teacher himself*. If the Socratic teacher started collecting disciples, this would be a betrayal of those for whom he is supposed to provide an occasion for self-knowledge (PF 11); indeed, he owes it to them to turn them away. But in the alternative hypothesis, where subjectivity is untruth, "the god's presence is not incidental to his teaching but essential. The presence of the god in human form - indeed, in the lowly form of a servant - is precisely the teaching, and the god himself must provide the condition; otherwise the learner is unable to understand anything." (PF 56)

> The object of faith is not a doctrine, for then the relationship would be intellectual, and it would be of importance not to botch it, but to realize the maximum intellectual relationship. The object of faith is not a teacher with a doctrine; for when a teacher has a doctrine, the doctrine is *eo ipso* more important than the teacher, and the relationship is again intellectual, and again it becomes important not to botch it . . . The object of faith is the reality of the teacher, that the teacher really exists. The answer of faith is therefore unconditionally yes or no. For it does not concern a doctrine, as to whether the doctrine .is true or not; it is the answer to a question concerning a fact: "Do you or do you not suppose that he has really existed?" (CUP 290)

The Incarnation is unthinkable because "existence involves first and foremost particularity, and this is why thought must abstract from existence, because the particular cannot be thought, but only the universal. The object of faith is thus God's reality in existence as a particular individual, the fact that God has existed as an individual human being." (CUP 290) To identify God with man in general is the heresy of modernity.

In the idiom of deconstruction, the identity of the teacher with the teaching is a blatant transgression of the deferral of presence enacted by the sign. The Word is the very paradigm of presence, the dream of a fixed point outside all systems of signification, to the point of overflowing the contradiction between presence and absence and cancelling the difference between sign and referent.

> Christ is . . . unlike other signs, for here the signified - God - is perfectly expressed in the signifier. He is at once inside and outside the sign system; since Christ *is* God, what He signifies is signified in and of itself: He is what Derrida calls a transcendental signified. But he is also a transcendental signifier. Miraculously formed, his body is uncontaminated by the very Fall which required the proliferation of signs and the distinction between presence and the sign of a presence.[27]

As both the gift and the object of faith, the Word performs what it states. "In short," as Marion puts it, "He says *himself* - the Word!"

> He says himself and nothing else, for nothing else remains to be said outside of this saying of the said, saying of the said par excellence . . . He is said and all is said: all is accomplished in this word that performs, in speaking, the statement that 'the Word pitched its tent among us' (John 1: 14), because he has nothing to do, here, other than to say [himself]. (GB 140)

If the teaching is the teacher himself, the disciple is not required to comprehend it but invited to follow the way of the cross. As Fabro remarks: "Christ wants imitators not speculators."[28] By starting with the 'what', the enquiry into the foundations of morality overshoots the 'how' and never arrives at the truth of Christianity, which is rooted not in reasons but in the authority of the Word, so that the decisive Christian category is not intelligence but obedience. The purpose of an objective body of doctrines is not to provide propositions about reality but to shape and regulate the follower's subjectivity. Steven Emmanuel argues[29] that Kierkegaard's account of the subjectivity of the Christian mode of existence anticipates the 'cultural-linguistic' model of Christianity proposed by George Lindbeck,[30] (which in turn has strong affinities with MacIntyre's account of socially-embodied traditions of enquiry) who compares the function of Christian doctrines to that of the rules of grammar. Just as a proficient speaker does not go around reciting those rules but exhibits conformity to them in correct patterns of speech, Christian doctrine is interiorized and embedded in Christian practice. "From this perspective, a religious statement acquires the status of an ontological truth only in so far as it is a performance that creates a correspondence between self and God."[31] Citing Aquinas on the way in which God-talk signifies, Lindbeck argues that Christian doctrines are not falsifiable in the manner of propositional truth. Just as we assert that the statement 'God is good' is meaningful and true without knowing how that statement signifies, the only way to assert the truth of the central doctrine of Christianity "is to do something about it, to commit oneself passionately to thinking and acting in the belief that the resurrection did in fact take place . . . to 'commit oneself to a way of life; and this concern is wholly congruent with the suggestion that it is only through the performatory use of religious statements that they acquire propositional force.'"[32] In other words, it is the 'how' that leads to the 'what', not the other way round. "The religious form of life is a true proposition to the extent that its objectivities are interiorized in such a way as to conform the individual to the ultimate goodness and reality of things; and it is a false proposition to the extent that this conformity is not realized."[33]

Even the author of *The Antichrist* agrees on this point. In a polemic directed at the Protestant doctrine of *sola fides*, Nietzsche writes:

> . . . the only thing that is Christian is the Christian mode of existence, a life such as he led who died on the Cross. . . . To this day a life of this kind is possible; for certain men, it is even necessary: genuine, primitive Christianity will be possible in all ages. . . . To reduce the fact of being a Christian, or of Christianity, to a holding of something for true, to a mere phenomenon of consciousness, is tantamount to denying Christianity.[34]

There are many points at which Nietzsche's thinking intersects Kierkegaard's. These are not confined, as is usually thought, to their respective diagnoses of modernity, for insofar as Nietzsche's philosophy is as purely parasitic as MacIntyre claims it is (TRV 215), one has only to switch its axiological coding in order to convert it into a repetition of what it repudiates. Not only is genealogy an "inverted mirror image" of the Enlightenment (WJ 353), but, more

importantly, it shows us the underside of the faulty Platonic metaphysics behind the Enlightenment. As Derrida writes, following Patočka:

> There has not yet been an authentically Christian politics because there remains this residue of the Platonic polis. Christian politics must break more definitively and more radically with Greco-Roman Platonic politics in order to finally fulfil the *mysterium tremendum*. (GD 28)

Unless there is something in the self that transcends its social and historical context and raises the individual above the public and the universal, then Nietzsche is right to add: "*In fact there have never been any Christians.*"[35]

4.2 The Dialectic of Nihilism

For Nietzsche, as for Kierkegaard, *what* is seen or done is always determined by *how* things are seen or done. Reality is perspectival, and since all perspectives are limited, a thing would only be defined "once all creatures had asked 'what is that?' and answered their question." (WP 556: 301) As Alan Schrift points out, "in saying that 'perspectives are necessarily false', Nietzsche indicates that if we retain the epistemological criteria of truth as adequate correspondence (*adequatio*), we must conclude that everything we apprehend perspectivally (i.e., all our 'knowledge') is *false according to these epistemological criteria.*"[36] Some interpretations, however, are narrower than others, namely, those produced by a mentality which is too weak or sick to generate values of its own, but compelled for the sake of security to ascribe a set of common meanings and values to objects in themselves. The will to truth at work in philosophy and science is thus a means of evading the task of interpretation, which is the fundamental activity of the will to power. It can be described as a "hermeneutical malaise,"[37] one symptom of which would be what MacIntyre calls the seventeenth-century invention of 'facts' (WJ 357). Harbouring a reflexive envy and hatred (*ressentiment*) of anything that threatens its standpoint by affirming its own difference, this is the passive nihilism of a crowd-mentality which is bent on reducing everything to its own level. As Nietzsche might have put it himself:

> Thus *ressentiment* becomes the constituent principle of want of character, which . . . can never understand that eminent distinction really is distinction. Neither does it understand itself by recognizing distinction negatively (as in the case of ostracism) but wants to drag it down, wants to belittle it, so that it really ceases to be distinguished. And *ressentiment* not only defends itself against all *existing* forms of distinction but against that which is still *to come*.[38]

If the passive nihilism of the will to truth accomplishes the devaluation of the highest values (the murder of God), leaving only brute facts, Nietzsche's brand of active nihilism redresses the balance by eliminating the facts. As a negation of negation, designed to clear the way for more creative interpretations, it is essentially a temporary phase, during which the

disappearance of the 'true world' leads to the disappearance of 'appearance.' Far from cancelling the concept of truth, however, the exposure of its defectiveness is a necessary condition of its transvaluation. Nietzsche's affirmation of plurality does not mean that one interpretation is as good as another, but that "the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity' be." (GM III, 12: 119) He claims that we can only do justice to a thing by viewing it from every side as if with the hundred-eyes of Argos.[39] The ability to master a multiplicity of competing drives and perspectives thus functions as a principle of selection, the highest interpretation being that which commands the greatest plurality. Interpretation, therefore, is a matter of converting of quantity into quality, which "is distinct from quantity only in that it is the aspect of quantity which cannot be . . . equalised out in the difference between quantities." (NP 43-4)

> Forces are said to be dominant or dominated depending on their difference in quantity. Forces are said to be active or reactive depending on their quality. . . . This is the problem of interpretation: to estimate the quality of force that gives meaning to a given phenomenon, or event, and from that to measure the relation of the forces which are present. (NP 53)

What comes to expression here, I would suggest, is the extent to which "[f]orce has become the modern figure of being." (GD 47) Echoing Heidegger, Derrida continues: "Being has allowed itself to be determined as a calculable force, and man, instead of relating to the being that is *hidden under* this figure of force, represents himself as a quantifiable power." (GD 37)

Since the quantitative is the definitive category of the aesthetic, it is not surprising to find Nietzsche deriving values from purely quantitative determinations, yet this brings him closer to MacIntyre than to Kierkegaard. For MacIntyre too, the highest interpretation is that which can incorporate the greatest number of its rivals, to which end he envisages a Thomist genealogy of genealogy (TRV 147). His call for the university to be reconceived as a "place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation" (TRV 231) in the conflicts within and between traditions of moral enquiry can be read as a contemporary restatement of Nietzsche's "public and formal" request "that some philosophical faculty might advance *historical* studies of *morality* through a series of academic prize-essays." (GM I, 17: 55) In both cases the deciding factor is intelligence. But according to Frater Taciturnus, the unconditional claim of ethics refuses to bargain with the more or less of human capacities and attainments.

> Indifferent toward the externality, which the esthetic needs (there must be great men, great subject matter, great events; so it becomes comic if there are small folk or petty cash), the religious is commensurate with the greatest man who has ever lived and with the most wretched, and equally commensurate . . . The religious is simply and solely qualitatively dialectic and disdains quantity, in which esthetics has its task. (SLW 442-3)

Weston points out that Nietzsche tried to resist the levelling forces of nihilism in the same way as Plato, by erecting a hierarchy. This is understandable, for "[w]ithin the idea of the pursuit of an end determined by human capacities there is no way of justifying treating all ends as having the same significance. Religiously conceived, of course, they all do have the same value,

namely, none."[40] This is why it is vital not to confuse the 'how?' - in the sense of 'which sphere of existence?' - with questions of 'how many?' or 'how much?' If there is an exception, it can only be the passion of inwardness, the desire for authentic selfhood which is the driving force of Kierkegaard's negative natural theology. Only the spiritual potential with which all are equally endowed exceeds the quantitative and opens out into infinity; and only then because, however much striving is involved, salvation is utterly dependant on grace.

> At its maximum this inward "how" is the passion of the infinite, and the passion of the infinite is the truth. But the passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity, and thus subjectivity becomes the truth. Objectively there is no infinite decisiveness, and hence it is objectively in order to annul the difference between good and evil, together with the principle of contradiction, and therewith also the infinite difference between the true and the false. Only in subjectivity is there decisiveness, to seek objectivity is to be in error. (CUP 181)

As we know, Climacus is not concerned with logical contradictions but with existential ones, such as the inevitable betrayal of the particular in the universality of thought and language. "Existence involves a tremendous contradiction, from which the subjective thinker does not have to abstract, though he can if he will, but in which it is his business to remain." (CUP 313) The task of becoming a self is a constant striving to reconcile the temporal with the eternal, the disjunction which gives rise to the split between fact and value which MacIntyre sees as a product of the Enlightenment, though at bottom it is a modality of sin, the separation of man from God. This disjunction can always be abolished by retreating into recollection or theoretical reflection - ultimately contemplation, the *telos* of the Aristotelian conception of the good life - for in the eternal medium of thought all contradictions are cancelled. However, as with the difference between good and evil, "[i]t is impossible to *become* both at the same time, as one *is* both by *being* an existing individual." (CUP 376)

If Kierkegaard responds to the contradiction between thought and existence by emphasising the importance of decisiveness and resolution, everything in Nietzsche's dialectic of sickness and health is decidedly ambiguous. As the motor of history, nihilism performs the labour of the negative, driving the endless cycle of recurrence with which Nietzsche trumps Hegel's evolution of *Geist*. Even the passive nihilism of Christianity has the positive function of disciplining the instincts,[41] while active nihilism, like Plato's *pharmakon*, is a poison as well as a medicine, for use only in an emergency. More importantly, the fact that Nietzsche never makes an explicit distinction between truth and knowledge, or what Kierkegaard calls subjective and objective thinking, makes it possible to take his philosophy in two very different directions. *On the one hand*, his all-embracing scepticism can be seen as a return to the *aporia* which prevented Socrates from embarking on the way of speculation, and which makes Socratic ignorance an analogue of faith: "[w]hen subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth, the truth becomes objectively a paradox; and the fact that the truth is objectively a paradox shows in its turn that subjectivity is the truth." (CUP 183) The insistence that all perspectives are false implies the principle: "*Veritas est index sui et falsi* [Truth is the criterion of itself and of

the false]." (SD 42) On this reading, in terms of Karen Carr's analysis of the different types of nihilism and their possible combinations, Nietzsche would be both an ethical and an epistemological nihilist, but not an alethiological one.[42] The nihilism which he sought to overcome is the existential nihilism which Kierkegaard calls despair, the feeling that life has no meaning. It is a world-historical version of Anti-Climacus' category of despair in weakness: in despair not to will to be oneself. (SD 49)

> Where does one not encounter that veiled glance which burdens one with a profound sadness, that inward-turned glance of the born failure . . . that glance which is a sigh! "If only I were someone else . . . but there is no hope of that. I am who I am: how could I ever get free of myself? And yet - *I am sick of myself!*" (GM III, 14: 122)

All despair presupposes a disparity between fact and value, or the way things are and the way we think they ought to be, i.e., that which binds us in despair and that which would release us from it (SD 60-1). As Carr points out, "[o]nly if we are unconvinced or reluctant nihilists would nihilism provoke anxiety or discomfort; only if we still believe in truth can our isolation from it provoke discomfort."[43] By liberating truth from knowledge, Nietzsche might be said to be safeguarding its transcendence.

On the other hand, if all perspectives are false, including his own, and subjectivity is untruth, then Nietzsche's refusal of the only alternative to the Socratic hypothesis seems to entail a version of the liar's paradox.[44] Schrift claims that he avoids this by affirming the universal scope of interpretation, and by replacing the criteria of truth and falsity with his quantitative continuum of sickness and health. "When not operating from within a context framed by the false disjunction 'either one truth/meaning or every interpretation is as good as every other interpretation', the charge of relativism loses its critical force and no longer appears to be the crime against Reason that philosophers have often thought it to be."[45] But this is precisely the problem: if the claim that all perspectives are false means that the terms 'truth' and 'untruth' cease to have any application, this cancels out the disjunction which is the basis of nihilism, leaving two possible consequences. "Either we dogmatically assert our views to be the only views possible or we believe only that our views are essentially on a par with those of everyone else and we are thus awash in a relativistic morass."[46] One way leads to totalitarianism, for in the absence of the space for critical leverage afforded by the distinction between truth and knowledge there is nothing to prevent whatever view happens to prevail from becoming absolute. The other way leads to the situation described in Kierkegaard's parable of the royal decree:

> Criticism which ought to survey the whole can hardly attain a survey of this prodigious literature, indeed criticism itself has become a literature so prolix that it is impossible to attain a survey of the criticism. Everything became interpretation - but no one read the royal command with a view to acting in accordance with it. And it was not only that everything became interpretation, but at the same time the point of view for determining what seriousness is was altered, and to be busy about interpretation became real seriousness.[47]

In the dialectic of scepticism and its refutation there is more than one way in which the saying can be betrayed in the said. From Kierkegaard's point of view, the endless play of intertextuality, indulged in for its own sake, is a symptom of aesthetic light-mindedness, though it does have the merit of making explicit what the self-grounding discourse of metaphysics conceals, namely, that its "secret in comprehending is simply to sew without fastening the end and without knotting the thread, and this is why, wonder of wonders, it can go on sewing and sewing, that is, pulling the end through. Christianity, on the other hand, fastens the end by means of the paradox." (SD 93)

A third possibility would be to stay with the Socratic formula, but to take it in the direction of Platonic speculation. This is what happens if the qualitative disjunction is abstracted from the first-person point of view and applied to humanity in general. Let me cite an example, "for we have plenty of time, since what I write is not the expected last paragraph which will complete the system." (CUP 71)

> Suppose that someone wished to communicate the following conviction: Truth is inwardness; there is no objective truth, but the truth consists in personal appropriation. . . . Suppose a man wished to communicate the conviction that it is not the truth but the way which is the truth, i.e. that the truth exists only in the process of becoming, in the process of appropriation and hence that there is no result. . . . suppose he hit upon the excellent short cut of communicating it in a direct form through the newspapers, thus winning masses of adherents . . . what then? Why then his principle would have turned out to be precisely a result. (CUP 71-2)

According to Weston, "Nietzsche's ascent to the general . . . *repeats* the characteristic philosophical move" of separating the question of the meaning of life from the person posing it, thus reducing the individual to "a *case* of a form of life." But since the question essentially involves the questioner himself, "it has to be characterized as despair and its resolution as . . . the taking on of a new 'how' of life."[48] But perhaps it is too easy to attribute Nietzsche's venture beyond good and evil to an unfortunate lapse into objective thinking. It has more of the character of a desperate wager, which Deleuze contrasts favourably with its Pascalian counterpart. "From Pascal to Kierkegaard one bets and then leaps. But leaping is not dancing and betting is not playing. . . . we have managed to discover another game . . . we have managed to make chaos an object of affirmation instead of positing it as something to be denied." (NP 37) However, "it is not every daring venture which is half the battle, since there is also a daring venture where much is lost."

> Besides, a daring venture is surely not merely a high-sounding phrase or a bold ejaculation, but a toilsome labor . . . a quiet consecration which makes sure of nothing beforehand, but risks everything. Therefore, says the ethical, dare, dare to renounce everything . . . dare to become nothing at all, to become a particular individual, of whom God requires everything, without your being relieved of the necessity of being enthusiastic: behold, that is the venture! (CUP 133)

Schrift maintains that Nietzsche's ambiguity reflects the creative tension in his theory of interpretation between philology (the 'art of reading well') and perspectivism, a tension which anticipates Derrida's discussion of the irreducible difference between dogmatism and relativism, or logocentrism and dissemination, and of the conflict within every discourse between an *archê* and an *anarchê* which makes both these modes of interpretation both possible and necessary.[49] The creative appropriation of meaning must be regulated by an acute responsiveness to the text itself, allowing it to call into question every attempt to master it.[50] This is precisely the kind of reading that the 'doubly-reflected' mode of communication practised by Kierkegaard (who thus anticipates the disappearance of the author in recent literary theory) is designed to elicit.

> For example, it is indirect communication to place jest and earnestness together in such a way that the composite is a dialectical knot . . . If anyone wants to have anything to do with this kind of communication, he will have to untie the knot himself. Or, to bring attack and defense into a unity in such a way . . . that the most zealous supporter of the cause and its most vicious foe can both seem to see in one an ally - and then to be a nobody oneself, an absentee, an objective something, a nonperson. (PC 133)

Thus far the Socratic model of maieutic communication. Schrift argues that "genealogy can be viewed as a methodological interstice between perspectivism and philology insofar as it demands both playful appropriation of and meticulous attention to the developmental history of contemporary values."[51] The creative tension between these two interpretative strategies (and the extent of his own debt to Nietzsche) is reflected in the interplay between system and history, dialectics and narrative, in MacIntyre's scheme of things. Despite his appeal to timeless truths and fundamental ontology, he knows as well as Nietzsche that the question of 'what is?' cannot be abstracted from that of 'which narrative?' Climacus, however, has no more time for historical investigations of morality than he has for system-building or ontology. Whether the moral historian takes the route of the genealogical or the arche-ological mode of enquiry, both belong to the way of recollection.

> Ethics looks upon all world-historical knowledge with a degree of suspicion, because it may so easily become a snare, a demoralizing aesthetic diversion for the knowing subject, in so far as the distinction between what does or does not have historical significance obeys a quantitative dialectic. As a consequence of this fact, the absolute ethical distinction between good and evil tends for the historical survey to be neutralized in the aesthetic-metaphysical determination of the great and the significant, to which category the bad has equal admittance with the good. In the case of what has world-historical significance, another set of factors play an essential role, factors which do not obey an ethical dialectic: accidents, circumstances, the play of forces entering into the historical totality that modifyingly incorporates the deed of the individual so as to transform it into something that does not directly belong to him. (CUP 120)

This is the danger of treating the phenomenon of nihilism as a world-historical event, or worse still, a philosophical position. In fact, the one leads to the other, by means of the same process of abstraction that prevents sin from appearing in philosophy, and which prompts Anti-

Climacus to remark "that in modern philosophy there is a confused discussion of doubt where the discussion should have been about despair." (PC 81)

Nonetheless, as Karen Carr argues, when the concept of nihilism is de-historicized it turns into its opposite, a form of absolutism which serves to reify the status quo. Since active nihilism is just as much a symptom of disease as its passive counterpart, the version of it embraced by such 'unrepentant' (as opposed to 'reluctant') nihilists as Richard Rorty is a sign that the condition it was meant to cure has become endemic.

> For many postmodernists, the presence of nihilism evokes not terror, but a yawn. . . . Regarded by Nietzsche as a condition created by a particular set of intellectual developments, by the late twentieth century nihilism is seen as implicit in the fact that human beings are historical creatures that must interpret their surroundings. As a result, nihilism ceases to be something from which we must escape, loses its potentially transformative and redemptive power, and becomes instead simply a rather banal characterization of the human situation.[52]

Carr traces the genealogy of this development back to the religious appropriation of nihilism undertaken by Barth and his circle in response to the collapse of liberal theology following the First World War. The crisis of meaning then afflicting European civilization was regarded as a privileged occasion for awakening the consciousness of sin, much as Kierkegaard saw despair as the precondition of faith. Regarded as an expression of sin, however, nihilism becomes coextensive with history, even if it comes to consciousness, both in the life of the individual and the history of the race, only in a moment of crisis. Thus the concept is de-historicized by association with sin, but for that very reason one should not wish to make it permanent. However, once such a concept is abstracted from the narrative of Fall and Atonement, as it was by the existentialists in the wake of World War II, its secularized version comes to be seen as a permanent feature of the human condition, one which is only problematic if we are deluded into thinking that there could be an alternative. "Thus the shift away from the ethical-religious response - which attempts to wrest from nihilism some kind of salvific power - to the aesthetic response is likewise a shift away from the terror and anxiety nihilism provoked in an earlier part of its history to rather calm acceptance, if not outright relief."[53] For Carr, this is a bargain in which more has been lost than gained. "While the good news appears to be that we need no longer worry about a situation that we seem unable to avoid, the bad news is that this transformation essentially reifies the present values, beliefs, and judgements of the historical community to which we belong into absolute truths."[54] The alethiological nihilism promoted by Rorty and other anti-foundationalists anaesthetizes the discomfort of existential nihilism by reassuring us that the truth we thought that we had lost was an illusion, while the absence of any court of appeal beyond the beliefs and practices of a particular community removes both the need for and "the possibility of any kind of ethical, religious or political transformation."[55]

Curiously enough, if one subscribes to the post-metaphysical critique of onto-theology, or if, as Nietzsche thought, the will to truth at work in the traditional alliance of Christianity and Platonism has indeed brought about its own downfall, something similar to the process

just described happens to MacIntyre's position. MacIntyre, of course, is neither an epistemological nor an alethiological nihilist, nor does he view the historical emergence of such phenomena as the final convulsions of the tradition he wants to recuperate, but if you subtract its ontological component, his theory is left with only its coherence and an appeal to warranted assertability. In the absence of the classical equation of thought and being, there can be no guarantee that the rationality of historically-extended communities, however systematic, corresponds to anything outside itself. According to Carr, a theory which cannot see beyond the norms and standards of a particular community leads at best to the sort of smugness that she and others have associated with Rorty's brand of liberal postmodernism.[56] Similarly, Caputo cites the bourgeois complacency of the values and mores that MacIntyre admires so much in the novels of Jane Austen (AV 181-87, 239-43).

> MacIntyre is quite right to find a world of Aristotelian virtues and vices in the novels of Jane Austen. But the biblical world is not to be found in the country estates and comfortable parsonages of the well-to-do, but in the slums and alleyways where the 'victims' of these wealthy Austenians dwell.[57]

As Levinas says: "Does not the coherent discourse, wholly absorbed in the said, owe its coherence to the State, which violently excludes subversive discourse?" (OB 170) True, MacIntyre is able to avoid legitimizing the established order by stopping short of the Hegelian (con)fusion of reason and history, but for the spirit of world-history (with the Prussian State as its epiphany) he simply substitutes a teleological conception of the narrative intelligibility of socially-embodied traditions of theory and practice. His account of the good life - "The good life is the life spent seeking the good life" (AV 219) - obeys the circular, autotelic logic of the aesthetic artefact, whose content is discovered only in the course of its self-unfolding. "The search for the good life, that is, has the character of the poetic 'event' (*Ereignis*) as the later Heidegger understands it; i.e., its only reality lies in its immanent and underived self-enactment of its own order."[58] It might be replied that the same holds true of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model of truth as performance, and that this is the only way that any form of life, including Christianity, can be rationally justified. But once again there is a crucial difference between making something the subject of a general principle and asserting the uniqueness of *this* particular truth. The 'grammar' of Christian discourse and conduct does not have its origin in the immanent rationality of the tradition of Plato and Aquinas, but rather bears witness to an exteriority which "tests the correctness of the hypothesis and demonstrates it." (PF 22) As Derrida argues, even if something of the Christian conception of responsibility has found its way into the work of such non-Christian thinkers as Levinas and Heidegger, one cannot assert that this could have happened independently of the event.

> Everything *comes to pass* as though only the analysis of the concept of responsibility were ultimately capable of producing Christianity. One might as well conclude, conversely, that this concept of responsibility is Christian through and through and is produced by the event of Christianity. For if it is as a result of examining this concept alone that the Christian event

> - sin, gift of infinite love linked to the experience of death - appears necessary, does that not mean that Christianity alone has made possible access to an authentic responsibility throughout history, responsibility *as history* and as history of *Europe*?" (GD 50)

The incommensurability between the ethical life of the Aristotelian *polis* and the Christian concept of responsibility is reflected in the contrast between the reciprocity of MacIntyre's ethic of proportional desert (which does not even match the generosity of the Marxian axiom: from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs) and the dissymmetry of the logic of the gift - the economy of sacrifice perfectly embodied in the life and teaching[59] of Christ. "We need to distinguish between two types of salary: one of retribution, equal exchange, within a circular economy; the other of absolute surplus value, heterogeneous to outlay or investment." (GD 105) Since the Christian alternative has yet to be realized, it remains untouched by the disintegration of the traditional framework in which our legal and moral practices are grounded. Nor is it affected by the genealogy which brings that process to light, so that, as Nietzsche points out, "[t]oday it is impossible to say for certain *why* people are really punished: all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated elude definition; only that which has no history is definable." (GM II, 13: 80) Nietzsche, of course calls into question the whole monstrous mechanism of hyperbolic debt by means of which Christian charity displaces the pagan economy of justice:

> . . . that stroke of genius called *Christianity*: - God personally immolating himself for the debt of man, God paying himself personally out of a pound of his own flesh, God as the one being who can deliver man from what for man had become unaquitable - the creditor playing scapegoat for his debtor, from *love* (can you believe it?) from love of his debtor! (cited by Derrida GD 114)

But notice that he does not enquire whether this doctrine can be rationally justified, but whether it can be believed.

4. 3 Kierkegaard and Nietzsche

Such was the energy and passion of Nietzsche's struggle with the nihilism that he saw as the legacy of Christianity and Platonism that it is tempting to read his career as a striking illustration of the paradoxical passion that wills its own downfall. According to Gregor Malantschuk, who, as far as I know, is the only commentator to have noticed how closely Nietzsche conforms to Anti-Climacus' description of despair in defiance, "[i]t is to Nietzsche's credit that he - unlike so many superficial atheists - does not stop halfway and openly or covertly cling to some meaning in life, but frankly declares that without God existence has no meaning and that in such a case all standards disappear and everything is permissible."[60] Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche tried to break free from the Platonic way of recollection, but he sought repetition in the doctrine of eternal recurrence rather than in the moment of Incarnation and

conversion. Perhaps as a consequence, "[d]uring the time the overturning of Platonism became for Nietzsche a twisting free of it, madness befell him."[61] In Kierkegaardian terms, so deeply was Nietzsche offended by the paradox that he was like one transfixed, hence the rhetorical intensity of his protest.

> And could spiritual subtlety imagine any *more dangerous* bait than this? Anything to equal the enticing, intoxicating, overwhelming, and undermining power of that symbol of the 'holy cross', that ghastly paradox of a 'God on the cross', that mystery of an unimaginable ultimate cruelty and self-crucifixion of God *for the salvation of man?* (GM I, 9: 35)

The vehemence of Nietzsche's reaction suggests an alternative interpretation of his own typology of active and reactive forces. In the *Fragments*, Climacus identifies two kinds of offence, which anticipate the categories of despair discussed in *The Sickness unto Death*.

> We can . . . very well distinguish between suffering offense and active offense, yet without forgetting that suffering offense is always active to the extent that it cannot altogether allow itself to be annihilated (for offense is always an act, not an event), and active offense is always weak enough to be incapable of tearing itself loose from the cross to which it is nailed or to pull out the arrow with which it is wounded. (PF 50)

It is the exteriority of the paradox that gives rise to the inescapable risk of offence. This is the effect of what Climacus describes as an 'acoustical illusion', wherein "[t]he more deeply the expression of offense is couched in passion (acting or suffering), the more manifest is the extent to which the offense is indebted to the paradox. So the offense is not the origination of the understanding - far from it, for then the understanding must also have been able to originate the paradox." (PF 51) The danger of offence is an inevitable consequence of God's descent to humanity in the guise of a suffering servant, in order to awaken love as a freely-given response. If the paradox is the criterion of itself and of the false, "then offense can be regarded as an indirect testing of the correctness of the paradox, for offense is the erroneous accounting." (PF 51)

The degrees of offence can be characterized in terms of Nietzsche's categories of *ressentiment* and bad conscience.

> Offense is unhappy admiration. Thus it is related to envy, but it is an envy that turns against the person himself . . . The uncharitableness of the natural man cannot allow him the extraordinary that God has intended for him; so he is offended. . . . But the more passion and imagination a person has - consequently, the closer he is in a certain sense (in possibility) to being able to believe, N.B., to humbling himself in adoration under the extraordinary - the more passionate is his offense, which finally cannot be satisfied with anything less than getting this rooted out, annihilated, trampled into the dirt. (SD 86)

For Anti-Climacus, the distance between man and God is measured in despair. But the relation between God and the self is so dialectical that, in a sense, the more intense the despair, the closer a person is to salvation, so that a passionate atheist is much closer to the truth than those who can only bear witness to a spiritless indifference.

> In making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses. . . . Therefore even if a man were to choose the wrong, he will nevertheless discover precisely by reason of the energy with which he chose, that he has chosen the wrong. (E/O II 114)

It is precisely on this point that MacIntyre focuses what is perhaps his sharpest criticism. While the main thrust of his argument is aimed at Kierkegaard's emphasis on freedom, his real complaint runs counter to this line of attack, for this time it is his turn to point out that there is nothing automatic about choosing the good, and Kierkegaard who stands accused of claiming that the process of becoming ethical is *necessary*, that "the energy, the passion, of serious choice will, so to speak, carry the person who chooses into the ethical." (AV 41) But MacIntyre insists that the aesthetic *can* be the object of a serious and passionate choice: "I think especially of those young men of my father's generation who watched their own earlier ethical principles die . . . in the mass murder of Ypres and the Somme; and who returned determined that nothing was ever going to matter to them again and invented the aesthetic triviality of the nineteen-twenties." (AV 41) And even if this decision is not a question of backsliding (for it is by no means clear that these young men had made the transition to the ethical in the Kierkegaardian sense; their 'principles' may simply have been the result of a conventional Edwardian upbringing), the resourcefulness of the aesthete in the art of self-deception cannot be overestimated. "So great can the burden of enjoying oneself become, so clearly can the emptiness and boredom of pleasure appear as a threat," (AV 73) that the aesthete has to resort to ever more elaborate devices. (MacIntyre fails to notice that this is the defining characteristic of the reflective stage of the aesthetic, dramatized by Kierkegaard under the heading of "The Rotation Method," (E/O vol. 1).) "He may even become an addicted reader of Kierkegaard and make of that despair which Kierkegaard saw as the aesthete's fate a new form of self-indulgence." (AV 73) This takes us into the realm of irony, the boundary zone between the aesthetic and the ethical, for the reader who understands what it is to despair has undoubtedly 'seen through' the relative values and idols of the aesthetic, even if she is unwilling or unable to take the next step. For Climacus, however, the purpose of irony is not to dissolve one relativity on the basis of another, but to dissolve every relativity by relating it to the infinite value which alone could give meaning to one's life as a whole (CUP 448-9).

> The individual who lacks the positive relation to the eternal but nevertheless turns against the relative values of life is described as in despair, and his activity leads to nihilism. It is ironical that much of what is described as existentialism fits this category and certainly would have been so regarded by Climacus.[62]

At first sight, Kierkegaard's account of the passionate energy of serious choice seems to conflict with his view that the infinite requirement of the ethical outstrips our powers to fulfil it, while neither motif leaves much room for the central Kierkegaardian value of freedom.

Whereas the trial undergone by Abraham involved a teleological suspension of the ethical, the normal condition of fallen humanity is one of suspension *from* the ethical.

> This impotence of the individual must not be understood as the imperfection of a persistent striving toward the attainment of an ideal . . . The suspension in question consists in the individual's finding himself in a state precisely the opposite of what the ethical requires. so that far from being able to begin, each moment he remains in this state he is more and more prevented from beginning. . . . aye, in a desperate ironical manner he is as if set free . . . and the more profoundly its requirement is made known to him, the clearer becomes his fearful freedom. The terrible emancipation from the requirement of realizing the ethical, the heterogeneity of the individual with the ethical, this suspension from the ethical, is *Sin*. (CUP 238-9)

The kind of freedom cited by MacIntyre as an objection to Kierkegaard's account of becoming ethical is therefore nothing more (or less) than the bondage of sin, described by Climacus as the forfeited condition, the loss of freedom incurred, both individually and collectively, by the Fall (PF 16-17). Hence the impasse of ethics, for the harder one tries to break out of this self-imposed bondage the more one becomes aware of the need for divine assistance. Like the secular existentialism of Sartre and Camus, the celebration of this 'fearful freedom' by those who survived the trenches of World War I is a step in 'the banalization of nihilism' described above. Regin Prenter makes the point that the value of arbitrary choice, which MacIntyre sees as the foundation of Kierkegaardian ethics, is in fact the exact opposite. "Sartre uses Kierkegaard's ideas to defend the very positions which Kierkegaard strove so passionately to invalidate."[63]

> The chief characteristic of choice in the sense intended by Sartre is that it is entirely free, that there can be no value which determines it. The choice is not determined by any eternal value, as with Kierkegaard; on the contrary, it is the choice itself which creates the value. Consequently, in Sartre's view, the fundamental choice can be reversed at any moment, and the fundamental character which determines actions can at any moment be totally altered by a new choice.[64]

So it actually becomes necessary for the Sartrian individual to indulge in the anxiety and dread involved in making decisions which can never be justified and are always subject to the possibility of sudden reversal. This once fashionable mood of 'existential angst' is but a distant echo of the fear and trembling with which the Kierkegaardian individual faced the judgement of God. Later even this remnant would be eliminated in the ludic post- or hyper-modern climate of advanced capitalism, where consumer choice is elevated to the status of an absolute value. According to Anti-Climacus, as soon as this kind of aesthetic life-style goes beyond the unconscious despair of a spiritless drifting to and fro it becomes demonic. As we saw in Chapter 2, at its maximum, it becomes the despair of the self-legislating sovereign individual that wants to create itself in its own image. The formula for the despair of the active type of self is: in despair to will to be oneself.

> Like Prometheus stealing fire from the gods, this is stealing from God the thought - which is earnestness - that God pays attention to one; instead, the self in despair is satisfied with

> paying attention to itself, which is supposed to bestow infinite interest and significance upon his enterprises, but it is precisely this that makes them imaginary constructions. . . . The self is its own master, absolutely its own master, so called; and precisely this is the despair, but also what it regards as its pleasure and delight. On closer examination, however, it is easy to see that this absolute ruler is a king without a country, actually ruling over nothing; his position, his sovereignty, is subordinate to the dialectic of that rebellion is legitimate at any moment. (SD 68-9)

What MacIntyre refers to as the Kierkegaardian concept of fundamental choice - "the choice of what is to count for us as a reason" (AV 42) - does not open up an unlimited range of options but signifies that the choice of how I should live always involves deciding between incommensurable alternatives, neither of which can furnish a reason for choosing the other. As Leibniz knew,[65] there is no such thing as arbitrary freedom, for freedom is never abstract but always concrete. "If freedom is given a moment to choose between good and evil, a moment when freedom itself is in neither the one nor the other, then in that very moment freedom is not freedom, but a meaningless reflection." (CA 111-2) The freedom of the Sartrian self belongs to the stage at which possibility's despair is to lack necessity.

> Possibility becomes more and more intensive - but in the sense of possibility, not in the sense of actuality, for the intensive in the sense of actuality means to actualize some of what is possible. The instant something appears to be possible, a new possibility appears, and finally these phantasmagoria follow one another in such rapid succession that it seems as if everything were possible, and this is exactly . . . the point at which the individual himself becomes a mirage. (SD 36)

Prenter attributes Sartre's distortion of the concept of fundamental choice to the influence of Nietzsche, but Nietzsche is as quick as Kierkegaard to condemn the shallowness and irresponsibility of modern notions of 'freedom'. In the course of a surprisingly robust defence of traditional institutions (in particular that of marriage) he says: "[i]ndependence, free development, and *laisser aller* are clamoured for most violently by those for whom no restraint *could be too severe* - this is true in *politics*, it is true in Art." (TI 100)

The individualism associated with this freedom is the antithesis of the individuality championed by Kierkegaard, which always contains an ineliminable reference to God, as the principle of subjectivity. In a passage which is reminiscent of MacIntyre's discussion of the typical *characters* of modern society (the aesthete, the manager and the therapist, (AV 27-31, 73-4)) - Derrida writes:

> The individualism of technological civilization relies precisely on a misunderstanding of the unique self. It is an individualism relating to a *role* and not a *person*. In other words it might be called the individualism of a masque or *persona*, a character [*personnage*] and not a person. (GD 36)

According to Patočka, whose analysis draws freely on Heidegger, the levelling effect of technology brings about a recrudescence of the pre-Platonic stage of orgiastic paganism. , "People live for the present, they live at top speed," (TI 97) as Nietzsche remarks, and the pace of modern life "encourages demonic irresponsibility . . . to the extent that it also produces

boredom, for it 'levels' or neutralizes the mysterious or irreplaceable uniqueness of the responsible self." (GD 36) It hardly needs repeating that, as MacIntyre argues so persuasively, this state of affairs is a consequence of the invention of the autonomous individual by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. But as Caputo points out:

> The Enlightenment clearly means more than one thing. It is rightly taken to task by Heidegger and MacIntyre . . . for its foundationalist projects in ethics and epistemology. But by asserting the spurious autonomy of subjectivity - whether ethical or epistemological - from the historical world in which the individual is inextricably embedded, the Enlightenment *also* discovered the legitimate aspirations of the individual, of every individual, to be *included* in the common good. It does both things at once, and I wonder how it could have done one without the other.[66]

To the extent that Anti-Climacus' analysis of despair can be mapped over the course of history, the emergence of the modern individual bears comparison with the stage of reflection at which the self first becomes conscious of having an eternal dimension: "this naked abstract self, which, compared to immediacy's fully dressed self, is the first form of the infinite self and the advancing impetus in the whole process by which a self infinitely becomes responsible for its actual self with all its difficulties and advantages." (SD 55) It is possible to trace in the stages of this process the whole development from Kant to Nietzsche.

> This infinite self, however, is really only the most abstract form, the most abstract possibility of the self. And this is the self that a person in despair wills to be, severing the self from any relation to a power that has established it, or severing it from the idea that there is such a power. With the help of this infinite form, the self in despair wants to be master of itself or to create itself, to make his self into the self he wants to be, to determine what he will have or not have in his concrete self. (SD 68)

Colin Gunton argues that the Enlightenment represents a justified assertion of the rights of the many against the oppressive rule of the one, a Heraclitean uprising within the Parmenidean monolith of mediaeval Christendom, at the same time as being a rebellion of man against God. But the displacement of God as the focus of unity leaves a vacuum, which then sucks in all sorts of false gods and universals - "the public, or 'the people' - or history or the market,"[67] resulting in "the subversion of the many by new and in some cases demonic versions of the one."[68] The philosophical revolution of the Enlightenment thus achieved the opposite of its aim, for the homogeneity of modern civilization, the totalitarianism of global capitalism, the technological levelling-down made possible by the paradigm-shift[69] regularly cited by MacIntyre in support of his epistemology, all represent new forms of bondage to the one. The same holds true of the post-Enlightenment reaction that led to Heidegger's infamous Rectorial Address in 1933, which Critchley sees as a disastrous repetition of "the Platonic moment of founding the *polis* on the absolute foundations of philosophical knowledge," contrasted by Hannah Arendt to "the Socratic moment of the interruption or critique of the *polis*."[70] These developments are the working out at the level of politics of the philosophical paradox analysed above (in Ch. 2), the conflict between the interdependent terms of the binary

system of Platonic metaphysics, duplicated in the opposition between classical and postmodern hermeneutics. As Levinas puts it:

> The permanent return of skepticism does not so much signify the possible breakup of structures as the fact that they are not the ultimate framework of meaning, that for their accord repression can always be necessary. It reminds us of the, in a very broad sense, political character of all logical rationalism, the alliance of logic with politics. (OB 171)

Gunton makes a powerful case for the replacement of the faulty metaphysics of Platonism by a relational, Trinitarian economy, a case which could be strengthened by the inclusion of Kierkegaard's account of the trichotomous structure of subjectivity[71] - but I have no space to pursue this suggestion here.

The effect of the homogenization of space and time brought about by the success of the Newtonian paradigm is to make it increasingly difficult to differentiate the trivial from that which merits serious attention, hence Kierkegaard's strikingly prophetic invective against journalism and the kind of politics which is driven by public opinion.[72] The 'news' feeds a craving for novelty which is characteristic of the aesthetic and a life lived only in time. Such a mentality has no time for the old; in its ceaseless efforts to avoid repetition it fails notice that "it is only of the new one grows tired." (R 4) George Steiner argues that the 'root-phenomenology' of the journalism which constantly invades our consciousness is not so much commercial or technical as 'metaphysical'.

> It articulates an epistemology and ethics of spurious temporality. Journalistic presentation generates a temporality of equivalent instantaneity. All things are more or less of equal import; all are only daily.[73]

It was to combat this levelling tendency that Nietzsche posited the doctrine of eternal recurrence. "Let us stamp the impress of eternity upon our lives!"[74] As the unity of multiplicity and the being of becoming (NP 71), this doctrine fills the gap left by God; as an ethical principle of selection, it provides an eschatological alternative to the annihilation of sin in the kingdom of heaven. Between the followers of Nietzsche and those who have learned from Aquinas it reopens one of the antinomies - the possibility of equally valid arguments for and against the universe having a beginning in time - into which Kant held that reason is bound to collide when it tries to think the whole. But perhaps Nietzsche's vision is also a distorted reflection of the Christian category of repetition. The life of Christian discipleship is only possible on the basis of a repetition wherein everything ventured in the leap of faith on the strength of the absurd is returned, transfigured, in such a way that "the temporal world is not denied, but its temporality is restored as gift and thereby rendered eternal." [75] The paradigm of repetition is the resurrection, which "restores no moral order," but by cancelling the power of death, "absolutely ruins the possibility of . . . any reactive moral order, which presupposes the absoluteness of death."[76]

Milbank argues that the transvaluation of negativity achieved by Nietzsche's eternal return is occasioned by a perceived threat which has to be overcome, and is therefore essentially reactive.[77] For his quasi-scientific doctrine is predicated on a limitation in the amount of available energy and the possible combinations of forces.

> The endless evolution of new forms is a contradiction, for it would imply eternally increasing energy. But whence would it grow? Whence would it derive its nourishment and its surplus of nourishment? . . . We insist upon the fact that the world as a sum of energy must not be regarded as unlimited - we forbid ourselves the concept infinite energy, because it seems incompatible with the concept energy.[78]

But if energy is finite why should time be unlimited? And why does Nietzsche imagine that his proclamation of this doctrine has the power to change the course of its endless round of identical repetition in which every moment is eternal without distinction? - "He alone who will regard his existence as capable of eternal recurrence will remain over; but among such as these a state will be possible of which the imagination of no utopist has ever dreamt!"[79] Unless, by some sleight of hand, the eternal return includes, as Deleuze claims it does (NP 72), an *ontological* principle of selection, it can only be "conceived metaphysically in such a way that the temporal becomes comically preserved in it." (CA 153)

> If eternity is conceived purely metaphysically and for some reason wants to have the temporal included in it, then it certainly becomes quite comical that an eternal spirit retains the recollection that on several occasions [multiplied infinitely by the eternal return] he was in financial difficulties etc. Yet all the effort expended to support eternity is wasted . . . for no human being becomes convinced of his immortality in a purely metaphysical way. (CA 153)

Since its power to transform history must be always already built into the cycle, the doctrine of eternal recurrence simply raises the aesthetic fatalism of the pagan world-view to a higher power, so that, from a Christian point of view, Nietzsche's announcement of its coming to consciousness resembles the figure which Anti-Climacus invokes in order to illustrate the anomalous nature of despair in defiance.

> Figuratively speaking, it is as if an error slipped into an author's writing and the error became conscious of itself as an error - perhaps it actually was not a mistake but in a much higher sense an essential part of the whole production - and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred toward him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No I refuse to be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author. (SD 74)

Premised as it is on a limited supply of energy, "Nietzsche's vision of joyful agonism, far from being a glimpse beyond ethics, sustains - *precisely* - morality as a heroic operation in conditions of scarcity."[80] This is Stoicism, which Kierkegaard sees as the last temptation in the existential dialectic of freedom and despair. The Stoic recognizes that freedom is repetition, but "{i]n case it should come about that freedom in the individual, related as it is to the environment, might remain, so to speak, lying in the result, so that it cannot withdraw (repeat itself), then all is lost." (R xvii)

> So then what freedom now fears is not repetition but change. If then this will to repetition is Stoicism, it contradicts itself and therefore ends by annihilating itself - in order in this way to uphold repetition, which is the same as to through a thing away in order to have it more securely hid. Then when Stoicism has stepped aside there remains only the religious movement as the true expression of repetition . . . (R xvii-xviii)

As Milbank points out, "Nietzsche's transvalued value, which is gift, once it is understood in a more Christian and therefore yet *more* radically anti-moral way . . . ceases to be in any way reactive: it is rather entirely gift which acts out of the plenitude of always more to come."[81]

Despite his admiration for the warlike aristocracy of Homer, Nietzsche's account of the sovereign individual bears little resemblance to the inhabitants of heroic societies, where, as MacIntyre emphasises, personal identity was determined by a strongly defined sense of one's place and function within an organic whole.

> These are not characteristics that belong to human beings accidentally, to be stripped away in order to discover 'the real me'. They are part of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties. Individuals inherit a particular space within an interlocking set of social relationships; lacking that space, they are nobody, or at best a stranger or an outcast. (AV 33-4)

In Kierkegaard's view this is an essentially a Greek conception of the self, and therefore an anachronism - not something that can be repeated but a nostalgic product of recollection. In calling for a return to this form of life MacIntyre fails to take into account the 'doubling' of subjective reflection which Kierkegaard sees as a consequence of the Incarnation.[82] The qualitative difference between the consciousness of paganism and that of modernity is reflected in the following account of the difference between ancient and modern drama, which should be read in conjunction with what was said above about the tragi-comic nature of the aesthetic perspective on sin.

> Even if the individual moved freely, he nevertheless rested in substantial determinants, in the state, the family, in fate. This substantial determinant is the essential fateful factor in Greek tragedy and is its essential characteristic. The hero's downfall, therefore, is not a result solely of his action but is also a suffering, whereas in modern tragedy the hero's downfall is not really suffering but is a deed. . . . The tragic hero is subjectively reflected in himself, and this reflection has not only reflected him out of every immediate relation to state, kindred, and fate but has even reflected him out of his own past life. (E/O I, 143)

As MacIntyre rightly points out, "freedom of choice of values would from the standpoint of a tradition ultimately rooted in heroic societies appear more like the freedom of ghosts - of those whose human substance approached vanishing point - than of men." (AV 126-7) In terms of the stages of despair, this is the point at which "[t]he self becomes an abstract possibility; it flounders in possibility until exhausted but neither moves from the place where it is nor arrives anywhere, for necessity is literally that place; to become oneself is literally a movement in that place." (SD 36) Possibility's despair is to lack necessity, but the fact that this is even a possibility for the modern self is enough to preclude any return to the relative innocence of

pagan immediacy. For Kierkegaard, there is a qualitative difference between the aesthetic sensibility of Greek culture and paganism in Christendom, in which the collusion of the will in ignorance (popularly known as 'denial') becomes the decisive element. While paganism does not yet consciously possess the category of spirit, "it is still qualified in the direction of spirit, whereas paganism in Christendom lacks spirit in a departure from spirit or in a falling away and therefore is spiritlessness in the strictest sense." (SD 47) The bondage to sin of paganism is relatively blameless, for the Greeks did not yet possess the concept of freedom in the fullest sense.

At one end of the spectrum of freedom lies the Pelagian illusion of autonomy; at the other extreme is the fatalism captured in the formula: necessity's despair is to lack possibility (SD 37). If the modern self exemplifies the former, MacIntyre's account of selfhood tends strongly towards the latter. For Kierkegaard, by contrast, human existence is doubly contingent: like nature, it is the product of a freely-acting cause, but with self-consciousness comes the possibility of a second coming into existence, or choosing what to become, and it is this 'reduplication' which produces the forward movement of history. "Our age has lost all the substantial categories of family, state, kindred; it must turn the single individual over to himself completely in such a way that, strictly speaking, he becomes his own creator." (E/O 149) Allowing for the aesthetic overstatement of the preceding remark, it can be seen that the decisive qualification of the modern self is a degree of freedom which, as MacIntyre confirms, was inconceivable to the ancients:

> The self of the heroic age lacks precisely that characteristic which . . . some modern moral philosophers take to be an essential characteristic of human selfhood: the capacity to detach oneself from any particular standpoint or point of view, to step backwards, as it were, and view or judge that point of view from the outside. . . . A man who tried to withdraw himself from his given position in heroic society would be engaged in the enterprise of trying to make himself disappear. (AV 126)

Kierkegaard's point is that the self is a synthesis of infinitude and finitude, possibility and necessity, the opposing elements which it is the task of the spirit to unite in the higher synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, a synthesis in which the spirit is itself one of the terms. The infinitizing medium of imagination provides the distance from the given which makes possible 'a movement in the place of necessity'. But the self must always return to its concrete self, "so that the more infinite it becomes in purpose and determination, the more personally present and contemporary it becomes in the small part of the task that can be carried out at once, so that in being infinitized it comes back to itself in the most rigorous sense." (SD 32) It is quite true that the malaise of modernity is reflection, which converts the individual into an abstract representative of an amorphous 'public'. But according to Kierkegaard, it is precisely by means of this abstraction that the individual will be "taught to be content, in the highest religious sense, with himself and his relation to God . . . instead of being

in agreement with the public which destroys everything that is relative, concrete and particular in life . . ."

> . . . and the absolute difference between the modern world and antiquity will be: that totality is not concrete and is therefore unable to support the individual, or to educate him as the concrete should (though without developing him absolutely), but is an abstraction which by its abstract equality repels him and thus helps him to be educated absolutely - unless he succumbs in the process. The *taedium vitae* so constant in antiquity was due to the fact that the outstanding individual was what others *could not be*; the inspiration of modern times will be that any man who finds himself, religiously speaking, has only achieved what *every one can achieve*.[83]

If however, the ethical proves to be an 'impossible ideality', and the freedom of the aesthetic is the demonic will of unfreedom and exclusion from the good, what part can it possibly play in the process of moral and spiritual development? This raises the question of the relation between grace and nature, the will of God and human autonomy. How can belief be the outcome of an act of will (PF 83) when even the desire for faith is a gift of God I must pray for? As Levinas remarks, prayer, as it were, both precedes and follows itself. "Men have been able to be thankful for the very fact of finding themselves able to thank; the present gratitude is grafted onto an already antecedent gratitude." (OB 10) They may even have found it necessary to pray for the gift of gratitude. But what then?

> Then to pray aright must again be given be given to me so that I may rightly pray for faith etc. There are many, many [envelopings] - but there must still be one point or another where there is a halt at subjectivity . . . unless we want to have fatalism.[84]

What, then, is subjectivity? For Levinas, it is constituted by the ethical relationship to the other, to whom one is directed by an order from on high, from the Other of the other. Kierkegaard defines it in terms of individuation and self-realization, but this can only be achieved by relating to others in the ethical, and by relating to God as the source of ethical responsibility in the sphere of religion. Both thinkers define subjectivity in terms of the relation of a creature to its creator.

> The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another. This is why there can be two forms of despair . . . If a human self had itself established itself, then there could only be one form: not to will to be oneself, to will to do away with oneself, but there could not be the form: in despair to will to be oneself. This second formulation is specifically the expression for the complete dependence of the relation (of the self), the expression for the inability of the self to arrive at or be in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only, in relating itself to itself, by relating to that which has established the entire relation. (SD 13-14)

This means that the kind of despair I have attributed to Nietzsche could not exist without what Levinas calls the passivity of a self that has been created, a passivity which is prior to the distinction between activity and passivity. The most aggravated form of this despair is "the sin of dismissing Christianity *modo ponendo* [positively], of declaring it to be untruth,"(SD 125) It is defined as "sin against the Holy Spirit." (SD 125) "This offense is the highest intensity of

sin, something which is usually overlooked because the opposites are not construed Christianly as being sin/faith." (SD 131) Yet it also bears witness to the dependence of the self in despair on the very thing that it denies, to the point of denouncing Christianity as the embodiment of decadence.

Kierkegaard is not suggesting that we should turn to Christianity as a means of avoiding despair. That would be to relapse into the reactive dread of the ethics of scarcity, which presupposes an ontology of conflict and disequilibrium. Instead, as Hannay points out, Kierkegaard's account of the task of life is based on "a preconstituted *assumption* of a 'highest good' or unity, to which despair only gradually becomes an accompaniment as, with consciousness's increasing transparency, this assumption's implications and difficulties become increasingly apparent."[85] Despair is always in some sense freely chosen, even if only by default, and in the transparency of the 'first form' of the infinite self, the emergent self has to accept responsibility for its own constitution by deciding how it will relate to itself. One can always evade this responsibility by not willing to be oneself - this is despair in weakness - but no one can get rid of it any more than one can get rid of oneself, "which, after all, is one and the same thing, for the self is the relation to oneself." (SD 17) The alternatives are perfectly clear: "[s]uch a relation that relates itself to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by another." (SD 13) Nietzsche takes up the first option, Kierkegaard the second; and there are no objective criteria by which to decide between them. From the point of view of a believer, however, the self that denies its dependence on the power that established it is, in Nietzsche's parlance (or Deleuze's Nietzsche - see above Ch. 2), refusing to allow itself to be 'acted', which is how the history of nihilism begins. Like the history of philosophy of which it is the product, this heroic type of self relates to itself by way of increasingly grandiose constructions and self-images, but the process is always subject to the dialectic of sudden reversal, because "no matter how long one idea is pursued, the entire action is within a hypothesis." (SD 69) In order to realize itself in its absolute significance, the self must renounce the conditionality of hypothetical imperatives and accept the unconditional obligation which is the essence of subjectivity. "The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it." (SD 14)

Notes

1 See for instance Nietzsche's comments on Plato in *The Twilight of the Idols*: "Plato is boring. . . . In the great fatality of Christianity, Plato is that double-faced fascination called the 'ideal', which made it possible for the more noble natures of antiquity to misunderstand themselves and to tread the bridge which led to the 'cross'. And what an amount of Plato is still to be found in the concept 'church', and in the construction, the system and the practice of the church!" (TI 114)

2 Jean-Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology," in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward, pp. 279-80.

3 For Kierkegaard as much as for Nietzsche the Cartesian formula is a tautology: "Thought and being mean

one and the same thing, and the correspondence spoken of is merely an abstract self-identity." (CUP 170) "But there is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed - the deed is everything." (GM I,13: 45)

4 John Wild, "Kierkegaard and Contemporary Existentialist Philosophy," in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, ed. Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, p. 24.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

6 Quoted by Cornelio Fabro in "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic," in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Howard A. Johnson, p. 161.

7 "The vision of God is so 'immediate', when God himself is the 'intelligible form', that the human mind may even be said to become 'deiform'." Fergus Kerr OP, "Aquinas after Marion," in New Blackfriars, Vol. 76, No. 895, July/August 1995, p. 356. The relevant passage is the *Summa Theologiae* Ia 12, 2-5.

8 Kierkegaard's emphasis on action or works, and on faith as the exercise of freedom, leads Cornelio Fabro to try to claim him for Catholicism. See Fabro, "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic," in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Howard A. Johnson, pp. 190-4. He attributes the eventual rejection of Kierkegaard's influence by Karl Barth to the latter's "crude Calvinism," which would not permit him to entertain the view that the natural religiosity of religiousness A could be a prerequisite for the reception of revelation. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

9 "When man's condition is immediate and mentally undeveloped, he is in a situation in which he ought not to be and from which he must free himself. This is the meaning of the doctrine of original sin without which Christianity would not be a religion of freedom." *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, p. 231.

10 Howard A. Johnson, "Kierkegaard and Politics," in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, ed. Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, p. 76.

11 MacIntyre, "Are Philosophical Problems Insoluble?" p. 74.

12 MacIntyre, "Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues," p. 116.

13 Comparing Hegelian logic to an automoton in a contemporary opera, Vigilius writes: "Just as Lulu comes running without anyone's being able to observe the mechanism of movement, so the long mantle of admiration conceals the machinery of logical movement." (CA 12)

14 Heidegger points out that this does not lead to an infinite regression of "the why of the why of the why etc.," because the first why is grounded in the why it puts in question. The object of enquiry is the questioning why itself, the entire activity of grounding truth and morality in the for-the-sake-of, the "primal phenomenon of ground." (MFL 214-5)

15 Jean-Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology," in *The Postmodern God*, p. 283.

16 Michael Weston, *Kierkegaard and Continental Philosophy*, p. 70.

17 Levinas, "God and Philosophy," in *The Postmodern God*, p. 57.

18 M. Jamie Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith*, pp. 46-7. (references to Kierkegaard's *Journals*, iii, VI A, n.d. [1845], 20; and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, 2: 21, 150; 1: 1-10 *passim*; 1:10, 59; 1: 2, 11.)

19 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 350.

20 Cornelio Fabro, "Aristotle and Aristotelianism," in *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions*, Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana, vol. 6, ed. Niels Thulstrup and M. Mikulova Thulstrup, p. 36.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Quoted by Fabro from the *Papirer*, X2 A 529, in "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic," in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, p. 164.

25 Quoted by Fabro from the *Papirer*, X6 B 79, p. 85 ff., *ibid.*, pp. 182-3.

26 Fabro, "Aristotle and Aristotelianism," *ibid.*, p. 37.

27 Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, p. 8.

28 Fabro, "Faith and Reason in Kierkegaard's Dialectic," *ibid.*, p. 168.

29 Steven Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation*, pp. 95-6 ff.

30 In George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

31 Emmanuel, *ibid.*, p. 99.

32 Emmanuel, *ibid.*, pp. 99-100, quoting Lindbeck, *ibid.*, p. 66.

33 Emmanuel, *ibid.*, p. 107.

34 Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 39, pp. 178-9.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

36 Alan Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, p. 153.
37 An expression borrowed from Karen Carr, *The Banalization of Nihilism*, p. 29.
38 Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, pp. 26-7.
39 Nietzsche, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (223), cited by Schrift, *ibid.*, p. 158.
40 Michael Weston, *Kierkegaard and Continental Philosophy*, p. 91.
41 "There is something admirable in the becoming-reactive of forces, admirable and dangerous . . . Every time Nietzsche speaks of Socrates, Christ, Judaism, Christianity or any form of decadence or degeneration he discovers this same ambivalence of things, beings and forces." (NP 66)
42 Karen Carr, *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth Century Responses to Meaninglessness*, pp. 17-18. Ethical nihilism is the denial of objective moral or ethical values. Epistemological nihilism is the denial of the possibility of knowledge. Its relation to scepticism is analogous to the relation of atheism to agnosticism. Alethiological nihilism is the denial of the reality of truth. If knowledge is understood in terms of the beliefs deemed legitimate by a community of discouse, it need not entail epistemological nihilism.
43 Carr, *The Banalization of Nihilism*, p. 129.
44 Carr points out that alethiological nihilism (the claim that there is no truth) is self-contradictory, whereas epistemological and ethical nihilism are not. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
45 Schrift, *ibid.*, p. 191.
46 Carr, *ibid.*, pp. 136-7.
47 Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, pp. 58-59.
48 Weston, *ibid.*, p. 84.
49 Schrift, *ibid.*, pp. 170-1.
50 Schrift, *ibid.*, pp. 188-9.
51 Schrift, *ibid.*, p. 171.
52 Carr, *ibid.*, p. 7.
53 Carr, *ibid.*, p. 129.
54 Carr, *ibid.*, p. 8.
55 Carr, *ibid.*, p. 140.
56 Carr, *ibid.*, p. 140.
57 John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, p, 63.
58 James Bradley, "Alasdair MacIntyre on the Good Life and the Narrative Model," in the *Heythrop Journal*, XXXI (1990), p. 325.
59 Derrida cites the passage from the Gospel of Matthew (5: 38-39) where the law of an eye for an eye is supplanted by Christ's injunction not to resist evil but to turn the other cheek. (GD 102)
60 Gregor Malantschuk, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche," in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, p. 127.
61 Heidegger, *Nietzsche, vol. 1: The Will to Power as Art*, p. 202.
62 C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's* Fragments *and* Postscript, p. 189.
63 Regin Prenter, "Sartre's Concept of Freedom Considered in the Light of Kierkegaard's Thought," in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, ed. Howard A. Johnson and Niels Thulstrup, p. 138.
64 *Ibid.*, p. 135.
65 "A perfectly disinterested will (*equilibrium*) is a nothing, a chimera; Leibniz demonstrates this superbly in many places; Bayle also acknowledges this (in opposition to Epicurus.)" (CA 236) See also Leibniz, *Theodicee*, *Opera philosophica*, I-II, ed. J. E. Erdman (Berlin: 1840; ASKB 620), pp. 595-8.
66 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 254.
67 Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity*, p. 31.
68 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
69 See Heidegger's account of the displacement of Aristotelian physics by the theories of Newton and Galileo in *Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics*, in *Basic Writings*, pp. 268-305.
70 Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 237. The heuristic contrast between Plato and Socrates comes from Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," *Social Research*, 57, no. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 73-103.
71 Anti-Climacus compares it to a house with three stories in which "all too regrettably the sad and ludicrous truth about the majority of people is that in their own house they prefer to live in the basement. Every human being is a psychical-physical synthesis intended to be spirit; this is the building, but he prefers to live in the basement, that is, in sensate categories." (SD 43) Some such stratification of the self seems inevitable. The fate of its secularized version is enacted by the tripartite self analysed by Freud (which could also be used to dramatize the relations between MacIntyre's three protagonists), whose superego can only be differentiated from the forces it exists to suppress by means of the dialectic of *eros* and *thanatos*, in which the voice of moral authority becomes identical with the life-denying force of Nietzsche's ascetic ideal.
72 Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, p. 37 ff.

73 George Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 26.
74 Nietzsche, *The Eternal Recurrence*, 35, p. 254.
75 Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, p. 230.
76 *Ibid.*, p. 229.
77 *Ibid.*, p. 222.
78 Nietzsche, *The Eternal Recurrence*, 4-5, pp. 238-9.
79 *Ibid.*, 32, p. 253. "The doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence is the turning point of history." *Notes on "Thus Spake Zarathustra,"* 41, p. 267.
80 Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, p. 225.
81 Milbank, *ibid.*, p. 226.
82 Cf. Hegel, "The right of the subject's particularity . . . the right of subjective freedom, is the pivot and centre of the difference between antiquity and modern times. The right in its infinity is given expression in Christianity and has become the universal effective principle of a new form of civilization." *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, p. 84.
83 Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, p. 41.
84 Quoted from *Journals and Papers*, vol.4, p. 352 (X2 A 301) by Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation*, p. 80.
85 *Alastair Hannay*, Kierkegaard, p. 192.

CONCLUSION

The problem with writing a dissertation on Kierkegaard is that it is impossible to avoid the performative contradiction of trying to convert the 'how' into a 'what', or treating an existential communication as an item of objective information which can be directly passed on. One is caught in a double-bind not unlike that described by MacIntyre when he complains that his attempt to criticize the philosophical presuppositions of the modern academy within the genre of the academic lecture is "to deliver what one has to say over to a form well designed to prevent one saying it or to prevent one being heard saying it." (TRV 220) In the context of the present discussion, the prospect of writing a conclusion seems like an invitation to complete the betrayal of the saying in the said.

> Suppose a man wished to communicate the conviction that it is not the truth but the way which is the truth, i.e. that the truth exists only in the process of becoming, in the process of appropriation and hence that there is no result. . . . suppose he hit upon the excellent short cut of communicating it in a direct form . . . what then? Why then his principle would have turned out to be precisely a result. (CUP 72)

One of the advantages of writing under a pseudonym is that one can disown the result. At the end of the *Postscript*, Kierkegaard declares that "there is not a single word which is mine, I have no opinion about these works except as a third person, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since such a thing is impossible in the case of a doubly reflected communication." (CUP 551) The effect of the pseudonyms is to create a distance between Kierkegaard and his readers which allows the text to stand by itself, independent of any authorial intention, thus placing the burden of authority on the reader. Yet he seems to have broken the rules of his own game by declaring in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* that the entire masquerade was designed from the first to cast light on the problem of becoming a Christian.[1] According to Joakim Garff, in offering us a privileged interpretation of the work as a whole Kierkegaard is taking on "the intricate task of making explicit the inwardness whose incommensurability is cited everywhere in the authorship as the real reason for communicating indirectly."[2]

> If he installs himself . . . in the position of a 'third party', then his statements about the authorship acquire a fairly reassuring objectivity, but at the same time he must renounce his normal and obvious right to determine the total significance of the authorship, and hence *The Point of View* loses its singular status and becomes one among many - debatable - points of view. If, on the other hand, he insists on being the best qualified interpreter of the authorship, and justifies this by reference to the indisputable fact that he is, after all, the author, then he must relinquish his (self-)constructed grasp of 'The Part of Divine Guidance' in the production.[3]

However, Emmanuel points out that the truthfulness of Kierkegaard's account of his own authorship "is only an issue if we assume that textual meaning is identical with authorial meaning, or that a text must mean what an author says it means."[4] He suggests that the work

as a whole should be read as the output of an ideal or 'implied' author, whose intention and sincerity can be inferred from the text itself.[5] We can then judge for ourselves whether the achievement of that implied author corresponds to the point of view expressed in *The Point of View*. As to the part played by 'divine guidance', the fact that Kierkegaard became conscious of it only in retrospect[6] reinforces his claim to be no more than a 'reader' of the pseudonymous works.

Lacking the authority of divine inspiration, I can claim no such exemption, but I take heart from Kierkegaard's conviction that, since man can do nothing of himself, not even the most trifling effort would be possible without God. In fact, if the self is constituted by its God-relatedness, the most fundamental expression of selfhood must be the prayer of thanksgiving that takes root in that conviction. Hence the overwhelming sense of gratitude which prompted Kierkegaard to offer his entire authorship back to God "with more diffidence than a child when it gives as a present to the parents an object which the parents had presented to the child."[7] And as Paul Minear points out, by insisting that the reader contributes more than the author, Kierkegaard extends this economy of gratitude to the neighbour.

> Each person is convinced that the other's contribution is the greater. Thanksgiving celebrates a relationship which destroys *quid pro quo* logic and creates a qualitative increment of debt in some sort of infinite proportion to the reality of gratitude. By gratitude to one another men participate in the infinite beneficence of God and in the mysterious process by which the prodigal Father imparts everything to sons who have nothing.[8]

This is a conception of subjectivity which is foreign to MacIntyre and Nietzsche alike, and here I have tried to account for both their positions in terms of Kierkegaard's analysis of the stages of existence. Nietzsche and Kierkegaard started out from similar points of departure, but the answers that they gave to the fundamental question of existence took them in opposite directions. The genius of Nietzsche found expression in an unequalled outburst of despair in defiance, a demonic anxiety about the good which bears a deceptive resemblance to the suspension of the ethical in the religious trial. As such, he provides a salutary example of the full consequences of ingratitude. However, as Eagleton remarks, "[i]f Nietzsche means such talk as 'the annihilation of the decaying races' literally, then his ethics are appalling; if he intends it metaphorically, then he is recklessly irresponsible and cannot be entirely exculpated from the sinister uses to which such ugly rhetoric was later put."[9]

MacIntyre, on the other hand, describes himself a Christian, but he is more comfortable with the natural theology of religiousness A and the systematic discourse of coherence and objectivity than with the more rigorous logic of the sacrificial economy of the gift. For those of his readers who have cut themselves off from the path of recollection he has nothing to offer beyond the assertion that only a conversion can save them. But this is the whole point, for the matter at issue is subjectivity. "This must constantly be borne in mind, namely, that the subjective problem is not something about an objective issue, but is the subjectivity itself." (CUP 115) The transition from religiousness A to religiousness B requires a conversion, a

turning away from what Marion calls the reflection of the Idol toward the invisibility of the Icon and the dissymmetry of a gaze which cannot be exchanged. In terms of Patočka's analysis, "[t]his is the moment where the light or sun of the Good, as invisible source of intelligible visibility, but which is not itself an eye, goes beyond philosophy to become, in the Christian faith, a gaze." (GD 93) The passage from Platonism to Christianity involves the interiorization of the Good as the inner light of goodness, which hollows out a space for the inwardness that is the essence of Christian responsibility.

> Once such a structure of conscience exists, of being-with-oneself . . . once I have within me, *thanks to the invisible word as such*, a witness that others cannot see, and who is therefore *at the same time other than me and more intimate with me than myself* . . . once there is secrecy and secret witnessing within me, then what I call God exists, (there is) what I call God in me . . . he is the absolute "me" or "self," he is that structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity. (GD 108-9)

Here, at the core of authentic responsibility, is an ineliminable dimension of secrecy which cannot be justified in terms of the Platonic rationalism which subordinates ethics and politics to objective knowledge, hence the inadequacy of the objective mode of direct communication.

> Suppose a man wished to communicate the conviction that the God-relationship of the individual is a secret. Suppose he . . . had sense enough to feel a little of the contradiction involved in communicating it directly, and hence told it to others under a pledge of secrecy: what then? Then he must . . . have assumed that the disciple was wiser than his teacher, so that he could really keep the secret while the teacher could not . . . (CUP 172)

Contrary to both Nietzsche and MacIntyre, I have argued that, at its most rigorous, the post-metaphysical mode of enquiry that links Kierkegaard to Derrida, Levinas and Marion finds it necessary to rediscover or to duplicate a conception of subjectivity, hence of responsibility, which finds its highest expression in Christianity. At the limit of its reach, philosophy can only acknowledge, with Patočka, that "[b]ecause of its foundation within the abyssal profundity of the soul, Christianity represents to this day the most powerful means - never yet superseded but not yet thought right through either - by which man is able to struggle against his own decline. (117)" (GD 50)

Notes

1 Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, pp. 5-6.
2 Joakim Garff, "The Eyes of Argus: *The Point of View* and Points of View on Kierkegaard's Work as an Author," in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Ree and Jane Chamberlain, p. 82.
3 Garff, *Ibid.*, p. 97.
4 Steven Emmanuel, *Kierkegaard and the Concept of Revelation*, p. 9.
5 Emmanuel, *ibid.*, pp. 20-1.
6 Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, p. 103.
7 Kierkegaard, *ibid.*, p. 88.
8 Paul S. Minear, "Thanksgiving as a Synthesis of the Temporal and the Eternal," in *A Kierkegaard Critique*, p. 301.
9 "It is remarkable," he adds, "how blandly most of his present-day acolytes have edited out these more repugnant features of the Nietzschean creed, as a previous generation edited in a prot-fascist anti-Semitism." Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 244-5.

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